



GOAT RIDERS IN THE SKY

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SELL THEIR SOULS TO SATAN?

THINGS TO COME? THE TOP TEN CONSPIRACY PREDICTIONS
HAUNTED LANDSCAPE GHOSTS OF THE GLENCOE MASSACRE
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THE CHICAGO MOTHMAN

THE RED-EYED, BAT-WINGED
MONSTER THAT TERRORISED
AMERICA'S WINDY CITY

**UFOs OVER THE
UNITED NATIONS**

**SIR ERIC GAIRY: GRENADA'S
SAUCER-MAD PRIME MINISTER**

**THE MAN WITH
MAGIC IN HIS BONES**

**MATTEO BORRINI: FORENSIC
ANTHROPOLOGIST BY DAY,
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**THE CHICAGO MOTHMAN:
RED-EYED CREATURES AND
GREEN-EYED MONSTERS**

In 2011, reports started to come in from the American Midwest about a weird winged entity that resembled the West Virginia Mothman famously documented by John Keel in the 1960s and 1970s. Had the creature made a new home in Chicago? Was a serial hoaxer at work? **TEA KRULOS** interviewed the researchers involved in the subsequent investigation and uncovered a story of terrified witnesses and bitter rivalries.

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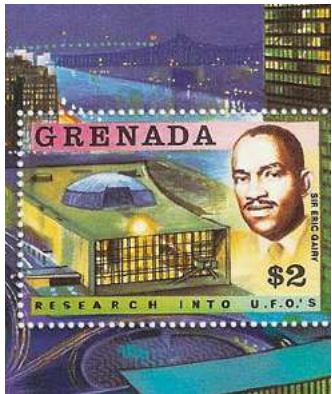
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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



OLD RED EYES IS BACK

Mothman, the winged monster with burning red eyes first reported from the previously unremarkable town of Point Pleasant, West Virginia, in 1966, has enjoyed remarkable longevity and ever-growing fame in the fortean field and, indeed, the wider world: you know you've become a paranormal superstar when, like great Cthulhu himself, you're immortalised with your own plushie.

We've explored the genesis and development of the Mothman story on a number of occasions – most notably in a special issue (see FT153:26-54) occasioned by the 2002 film adaptation of John Keel's 1975 book *The Mothman Prophecies*, the fortean masterpiece that put Point Pleasant and its mysterious visitor firmly on the map.

There have been numerous sightings of 'winged weirdies' (as our friend Loren Coleman dubbed them) around the world both before and since the Mothman incidents – including reports of pterosaurs, thunderbirds and owlmen – but when, starting in 2011, there was an outbreak of sightings in and around Chicago of another bat-winged, red-eyed monster, it was inevitable that the 'Mothman' moniker was soon attached to the reports of a terrifying entity haunting the Windy City.

In our cover story, Tea Krulos focuses on the response from the various paranormal investigators who became embroiled in the case: he has conducted detailed interviews with 12 of the key players, a decade on from the Chicago Mothman's dramatic debut in a photo sent to the Mutual UFO Network. It's fascinating to follow how this new Mothman story grew legs (and wings) as more and more witness statements

came in, but what's even more striking is Tea's account of how investigations that began in a spirit of cooperation gradually bogged down in disagreements over methodology and evidence, before ending in professional rivalry and bitter mutual recrimination.

When John Keel broke the original Mothman story – and subsequently elaborated and embroidered it in articles, books and interviews – he had, in a sense, sole rights over it and thus a high degree of control in shaping how our subsequent ideas of Mothman were formed. In the 21st century, with a growing number of paranormal investigators and commentators, all able to share material and argue about it online, it's far harder to agree on, let alone retain control of, the narrative. It's a long story, but an important and illuminating one, so we've had to spread it over two issues – make sure you pick up next month's FT to get the complete picture.

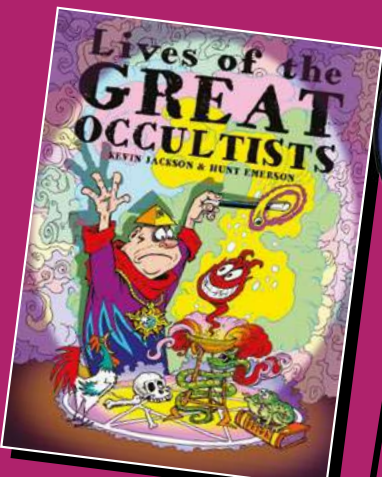
ERRATA

FT424:46-49

A couple of cock-ups in our coverage of the anniversary of *Ghostwatch* this issue. As the programme's writer, Stephen Volk, pointed out, in the FT article its executive producer Richard Broke "became Richard 'Brooke' – twice!" Possibly by way of consolation, the article's author, Stu Neville, was described in his byline as "FT's resident coach potato".

FT424:55: An error in this issue's books pages meant that the review of *Of Books and Beasts: A Cryptozoologist's Library* was wrongly described as being written by Darren W Ritson and published by White Crow Books. *Of Books and Beasts* is by the well-known cryptozoological author Matt Bille and is published by Hanger 1 Publishing. Our apologies to the author, publisher and reviewer Richard Freeman, who was not responsible for the incorrect information

FT425:56: Paul Devereux would like to correct a couple of errors in Bob Rickard's review of *The Powers of Ancient and Sacred Places*: "I hail from Leicestershire, not Nottinghamshire, and the 'fault area' was around Charnwood Forest in that county. The sonic frequency of Stonehenge's standing stones is 110 Hz, not 111 Hz. Later QEEG (Quantitative Electroencephalogram) work showed 110 Hz to be the most neurologically activating frequency."



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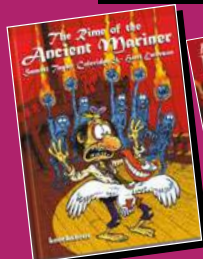
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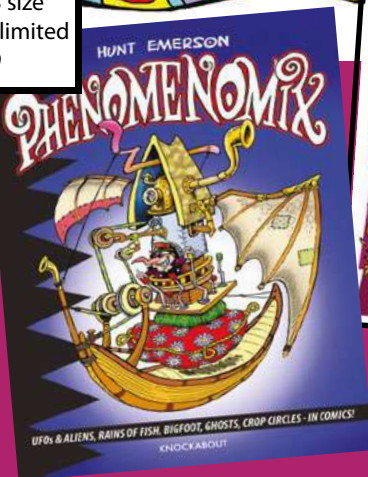
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

HIGH STRANGENESS IN CONNECTICUT

Since 2021 Connecticut seems to have been experiencing something of a UFO flap, with a steady flow of reports from the state being made to the US National UFO Reporting Centre (NUFORC). While one sighting was clearly a partly deflated weather balloon and others are likely to be attributable to misperceived drones or Starlink satellites, there have been more than a few reports that are less easily explained. These include a bright, slightly bluish “ball of light with rope-like appendages hanging” from it seen over Naugatuck on 6 January 2021, which sounds like it could be ball lightning – but it was followed a short time later by an exceptionally large and loud helicopter – while in Weston, the day before, a local (the NUFORC database redacts names) saw a large, bright white teardrop-shaped object with a neon green interior cross the road in front of them around 5.30pm.

There have also been numerous reports of fireballs. One was described as “a bright orange glowing object that resembled an intense sunrise” as it moved steadily and horizontally across the sky at a time when no meteors had been reported, while others were said to have “moved with intent and intelligence”. The state has several Multiple Anomaly Detection & Automated Recording (MADAR) nodes, devices triggered by rapid barometric and electromagnetic changes in the atmosphere that are believed by some to be the signature of UFO activity, and on 9 October 2022 the manager of one of was alerted to something nearby. The NUFORC report says: “At first the only thing that he saw was a few planes flying by, and as he was looking



ABOVE: A fireball-like object over Waterford, Connecticut, on 22 November 2022.

“It looked like a tree on legs with small arms”

through his binoculars at one of the planes, he spotted a small round black object descending from the clouds above the plane and ascending back up. It repeated this manoeuvre twice as if trying to stay concealed in the clouds.”

TicTacs and at least one classic cigar-shaped object have been reported too, as well as several encounters with entities. On 8 September 2021 a witness in Oxford, Connecticut, saw three bright but silent objects hovering for about 30-40 seconds, followed by “a bright flash, almost like the light was scanning from front to back, but the light was intense, almost as bright as a spotlight on a helicopter. Then I was able to see

something/someone lowered out of one of the craft into the field across the street then quickly go back up into the craft. Shortly after the three bright lights flashed and disappeared but I could see the light trails behind them and still without making any noise.” The UFO apparently also had “an aura or haze” and “emitted beams”.

However, the most baffling entity sighting does not have any apparent connection to a UFO. On 3 August 2022 at 10.45am, in broad daylight, an Oxford, Connecticut, resident saw something that sounds closer to Groot from Marvel’s *Guardians of the Galaxy* movies (above) than anything else.

The witness’s NUFORC report reads: “I own 14 acres of woods and am surrounded by many more. I was driving down my driveway when a bipedal

creature about 4ft [1.2m] tall and about as wide as my thigh (I’m 5’6” [1.68m], 140lb [64kg], so not big) ran out of the woods to my left, across my driveway and into the woods/yard of the property on the right. It was about 10 yards away. It looked like a tree on legs with small arms. No visible curves, hips or shoulders. Just straight. It was brown, skinny, no fur or hair, lightning fast and light as a feather. Almost looked like it wasn’t even touching the ground. Didn’t hear a sound from it running and all the birds and other animals were dead silent. When it ran it didn’t prance like most animals or run like a human. Its legs were moving, as if you were pedalling a bicycle. I saw the back and a bit of the right side of it. I didn’t see the front or a face. I didn’t see a tail, ears or any other body parts a normal animal or human would have. About two months ago I was outside around 10pm and there were two owls hooting back and forth. Then I heard this Godawful screeching sound (wasn’t a fisher cat or screech owl). I have no idea if that was

related or not. I don’t know if it was for sure an alien, but I don’t know what else it could be. I did not see any craft or anything, although I wasn’t going to walk through the woods to look either.”

In its appearance and behaviour it sounds more like a type of fairy or a “stick man” entity than an alien, but whatever it was, something strange has definitely been going on in Connecticut. patch.com/connecticut, 4 April, 3 Sept 2021, 1 Jan 2022, 2 Jan 2023; nuforc.org.





GREAT BALLS OF FIRE!

Meteorite mayhem and alien objects

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GOLDEN RETRIEVER

Detectorist's dog makes a valuable find

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STRANGE CONTINENT

Euro-ghosts and out-of-place animals

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RUSSIA VS PSYCHICS



ABOVE: Officers of the Russian Federal Guard Service (FSO). BELOW: General Dmitry Kochnev, who has been head of the FSO since 2016.

With Ukraine surprising the Russians by failing to welcome their invasion with open arms, and the subsequent war demonstrating the less than stellar performance of their military, Russia's justification for invading Ukraine has taken on a more mystical tone in recent weeks. Having largely failed to convince the world that it is doing so to purge the place of Nazis, the Russian leadership has taken to claiming they have a moral imperative to "carry out the de-Satanization of Ukraine". This seems to be meant literally, echoing Conservative Russian Orthodox ideas that the country is engaged in spiritual warfare against enemies who are actual demons in human form.

Russia is a country where allegedly some 60 per cent of the population believe in some form of magic, and Vladimir Putin is reported to use psychics, occultists, astrology and numerology to guide his actions, so it is not entirely surprising that the whole

enterprise is taking a mystic and paranormal turn. In this febrile atmosphere, the Russian Federal Guard Service (FSO), has circulated a memo outlining how it would deal with the Ukraine war spilling over onto Russian soil. Leaked to the Russian exile news outlet *Insider*, it suggests the FSO, which is the protection service for Putin and other high-ranking officials, has a fairly unusual view of what such an attack by Ukraine or NATO might involve.

The memo focuses on psychological preparedness and providing FSO officers with the "moral and psychological support" to resist a "massive ideological attack". They expect this to include conventional propaganda campaigns, but their preparations focus on deflecting "psychological infection of personnel", warning of "psi-generators", "computer psi-viruses," and "hypnotic abilities" being deployed against them by potential enemies.

While the Cold War arms race saw both the US and the Soviets exploring all kinds of psi techniques as potential weapons, the US (allegedly) gave up on them long ago, but Russians still seem to view them as potentially part of the military arsenal. In 2019, a respected Russian military journal asserted that their troops had psychic capabilities and had used them against enemies. It claimed that soldiers had learned to read thoughts from telepathic dolphins and that psychic soldiers had been able to jam radio signals and crash computers with their minds alone.

The FSO memo reveals that their deputy director, General Alexander Komov, is responsible for defence against the dark arts within the organisation. He has form in this area, being known to retain a group of freelance advisors that includes astrologers, occultists and psychics. His proposed techniques for hardening his troops against these psychic assaults include telling them stories about the heroism of their colleagues, sending them on visits to the FSO Hall of Fame and History and attending Moscow's Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan. There will also be a "buddy system" with the memo saying, "It is necessary to attach the most politically savvy officers of the FSO to the least stable," and, rather more ominously, it suggests officers experiencing "neuropsychiatric instability" will need to be committed to hospital if psychologically attacked. Washington-based Russia expert Natalia Antonova says: "This issue of hypnosis and telekinesis... I think the Russians truly believe it. Most of us are still trying to exist in the real world, and [the Russian leadership] are not. They're not trying anymore". *foreignpolicy.com*, 3 Jan 2023.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

KEEP YOUR CLOTHES ON AND STOP BEING SEXY, STRIPPERS TOLD

Irish Independent, 23 June 2022.

Hopes to bring back the dead

Sun, 4 Aug 2022.

COLONY OF BEE-KEEPERS NESTS IN NORFOLK QUARRY

Country Standard, Summer 2022.

Spooks have no time to diet

Mail on Sunday, 4 Sept 2022.

PIG VOMIT TOXIN KEY TO MARTIAN METEORITE MYSTERY.

BBC News, 25 Oct 2022.

Giant runaway balls cause chaos on London street

D.Telegraph, 1 Nov 2022.





SIDELINES

CHESSE CHEAT?

After world chess champion Magnus Carlsen was beaten by rank outsider Hans Niemann in the \$350,000 Sinquefeld Cup tournament, he withdrew from the event with a cryptic tweet seeming to imply Niemann had cheated. Speculation as to how he might have done so was rife, including the suggestion that Niemann had been fed moves via radio-linked vibrating beads hidden in his anus. He responded by offering to play naked to refute cheating allegations. *metro.co.uk*, 14 Sept 2022.

UNWISE UKRAINIANS

Two Ukrainian soldiers found themselves in hot water after they brought a rocket-propelled grenade launcher to a funfair in Chernihiv, northern Ukraine, as part of a wartime morale-boosting effort and allowed a 10-year-old boy to handle the weapon. He accidentally fired the grenade, injuring 15 people, including himself and his brother, and caused panic among fairgoers who thought it was a Russian attack. *dailymail.co.uk*, 5 Sept 2022.

"AND THE SCORE IS..."

In Sierra Leone, two football matches are being investigated for match fixing by the National Football Association due to their unusual scores of 91-1 and 95-0. Previous games in Nigeria with scores of 67-0 and 79-0 are widely believed to have been due to match fixing, but the highest scoring game ever recorded, with a result of 149-0, took place in Madagascar in 2002, and was due to one team's players repeatedly kicking the ball into their own net in protest at refereeing decisions. *The Economist*, 9 July 2022.



MARTIN ROSS

CRYPTO-CURIOSITIES

Recent discoveries and ongoing controversies



NFSA / YOUTUBE

LAST THYLACINE REDISCOVERED (PROBABLY)

The remains of the last recorded living thylacine, which died in Beaumaris Zoo in Hobart, Tasmania, on 7 September 1936, were long thought to have been lost. They were known to have been passed to the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), but for years "many museum curators and researchers searched for its remains without success," said thylacine researcher Dr Robert Paddle. "No thylacine material dating from 1936 had been recorded in the zoological collection, and so it was assumed its body had been discarded." However, Paddle, along with TMAG curator of vertebrate zoology Dr Kathryn Medlock, found an unpublished internal report from the museum's taxidermist that showed he had worked on a thylacine specimen in 1936/37, so they carried out a review of the thylacine skins and skeletons in the TMAG. "We tried to work out which specimens we could trace to something. There was just a skeleton and flat skin left over," Medlock said. These had been used as education specimens because in 1936 no one realised that they came



These remains do not belong to the male known as Benjamin

from the last known thylacine: at the time it was assumed that there were still some living in the wild. As a result, the remains had not formally entered the museum collection and been documented, so could not be traced through archive or collections research. "The skin was carefully tanned as a flat skin by the museum's taxidermist, William Cunningham, which meant it could be easily transported and used as a demonstration specimen for school classes learning about Tasmanian marsupials," explained Medlock. It was used in the education department until the 1980s, then put in a cupboard and forgotten

ABOVE AND LEFT: Colourised frames from a 1933 film of 'Benjamin' in his cage at Beaumaris Zoo, Hobart.

about, but still has flattened patches in the fur where generations of school children had patted it.

However, these remains do not belong to the male known as Benjamin, the Beaumaris Zoo thylacine almost universally credited as the last living specimen and featured in the best-known film of a living thylacine. Paddle says that the Benjamin story is "an unfortunate myth. It's time to remove it from the literature. It's so appalling Kathryn [Medlock] and I haven't even mentioned it in the [research] paper." While there was a male thylacine at Beaumaris Zoo when the film was made, Paddle and Medlock say that he wasn't named Benjamin and he wasn't the last one. It is not clear when this male died, but Paddle and Medlock claim that another joined the zoo in mid-1936, a female captured by a trapper named Elias Churchill in May 1936 and quietly sold to the zoo shortly afterwards. There has been some debate as to whether Churchill sold the zoo a thylacine at this time (he had provided them with previous specimens in the 1920s), but



Paddle and Medlock say that the transaction was kept quiet because the animal had been caught in an illegal ground snare and he risked prosecution if that became known.

They say that the Churchill female was the last known living thylacine, and she, not the male, was the one that died on 7 September 1936. Paddle says the “Benjamin” story was made up in the 1960s by someone who didn’t even work at the zoo. “In May 1968, an individual approached Graham Pizzey, the Victorian naturalist, and said ‘I’m the last curator at Hobart’s zoo,’” he explained. “He tells this fantastic story of the last specimen thylacine being male and called Benjamin, of it being tame, of it being fed live rabbits.” The man was named Frank Darby, and when the story reached Tasmania, press there approached Alison Reid, whose father ran the zoo until his death in 1935, and who had worked there herself. She was emphatic that “nobody called Frank Darby was ever a keeper of animals at Hobart’s zoo,” and, Paddle added, “also took incredible offence at the idea that her father and herself were feeding live prey to their carnivores as a public exhibition.” Paddle adds that Darby “exposed himself as knowing nothing about the species” when he asserted thylacines were “mute, voiceless... This was a myth created... in the 1920s, when everybody was saying [thylacines] were out there destroying the sheep industry and the reason you can’t find them is they don’t make a sound.” In fact, Paddle says, they made a “coughing bark” as well as a variety of other sounds.

The filmed Beaumaris Zoo thylacine from the 1930s was verifiably male (its scrotal sac is visible) and there seems to be no clear record of that individual’s death before the last survivor died on 7 September 1936, while the zoo is known to have only ever had one thylacine at a time on show during the decade. As a result, the identification of the museum remains as those of the last known living thylacine relies on Paddle and Medlock’s deductions being accurate and the Churchill sale story being

correct. *theguardian.com*, 5 Dec; *abc.net.au*, 5 Dec; *sciencealert.com*, 6 Dec 2022; *naturalworlds.org/thylacine*. See FT49:5-7, 46-47, 62:54-56, 124:7, 165:21, 247:22, 290:21, 295:21, 298:36-41, 319:19, 402:11.

ALIEN HAND (PROBABLY NOT)

Walking along a beach in Ilha Comprida, São Paulo State, Brazil, on 20 November, Leticia Gomes Santiago and her boyfriend Devanir Souza were surprised to find what they thought was a giant hand with bony fingers in an advanced state of decomposition. Puzzled by what it might be, they had the presence of mind to retrieve it for further examination. Speaking to Brazilian press, they said it “looks like ET’s hand”, inevitably causing the more credulous and sensational media to speculate that it might be the remains of an alien.

Weird and wonderful remains of things washed up by the sea almost always have a mundane explanation, and non-scientists rarely appreciate the weird things that decay and sea immersion can do to a corpse. This find, too, was swiftly resolved as the skeletal remains of a cetacean flipper, probably from a porpoise, by marine biologist Eric Comin, who from the level of decomposition estimated that it had been dead for about 18 months. However, Dr Robert Boessenecker, a

palaeontologist specialising in cetaceans, disputed this finding with a detailed analysis posted on his Twitter account (@CoastalPaleo) saying, “The Brazilian mystery flipper is NOT a cetacean!” and expressing exasperation about biologists without detailed specialist knowledge of cetacean anatomy jumping to conclusions. He pointed out that in the mystery limb the humerus bone is much larger than the radius and the ulna, which is not the case with cetaceans, and that the size and shape of the hand bones also did not match those of cetaceans, even those of the South American river dolphins, which differ from most other dolphins. He also dismissed the possibility of it being a seal or a manatee based on the relative size of the “fingers” as well as on the size of the arm bones. He feels it could be from a sea turtle, but notes that sea turtle researchers say it looks more like a cetacean to them. In the discussion with his Twitter followers Boessenecker agrees with the suggestion that it could actually be a human-made item, saying “It’s like someone had a basic knowledge of what some generic marine tetrapod flipper skeleton should look like and sculpted it.” So, it seems for now, the limb remains mysterious – although still unlikely to be from an alien. *dailymail.co.uk*, 24 Nov; *twitter.com/CoastalPaleo/status/1600875884206252032*, 8 Dec 2022.



ABOVE: Two images of the ‘alien hand’ found on the beach at Ilha Comprida. Experts disagree as to whether or not it is actually a skeletal cetacean flipper.

SIDELINES

WITHOUT A BARREL

While attempting to take a photo at the top of the Cumberland Falls in Kentucky, a 36-year-old woman dropped her phone in the river. Reaching to retrieve it, she fell in and was swept over the 68ft (21m) falls and into the pool beneath. Witnesses called emergency services but when they arrived, she was able to swim over to the rescuers. Medics released her without needing to take her to hospital. It is unclear what happened to the phone. *wymt.com*, 8 Sept 2022.

FREEZER ESCAPE

When Brazilian Romualdo Macedo Rodrigues’s 23ft (7m) wooden boat sank during a fishing expedition to French Guiana, he realised that his only chance of survival lay in climbing into a freezer he had on board. Over 11 days Rodrigues drifted more than 280 miles (450km) in his freezer, without food or water, until he was picked up by a boat off the coast of Suriname. He was dehydrated and disorientated, had sunstroke and his clothes were torn. He had lost 10lb (4.5kg) during his ordeal but said, “This fridge, for me, was God. A miracle”. *metro.co.uk*, 2 Sept 2022.

PREMIER PROTEST

A drunk man staged a protest outside a Premier Inn in Bournemouth, Dorset, after staff wouldn’t let him in to what he thought was his room. He lay down in the street and refused to move until police arrived and explained that there were five Premier Inns in Bournemouth, and he was outside the wrong one. *metro.co.uk*. 19 July 2022.

ROBOT VIOLENCE

During a chess match in Moscow a seven-year-old boy had his finger broken by the robot he was playing against. Video shows the robot taking one of the boy’s pieces and then as he makes his own move the robot grabs his finger. “The robot broke the child’s finger,” said Sergey Lazarev, Moscow Chess Federation President. “This is of course bad,” he admitted, but pointed out that the boy had violated the rules by moving too fast after the robot’s turn, adding that the robot’s suppliers were “going to have to think again”. *theguardian.com*, 24 July 2022.



SIDELINES...

WALLABY THUGS

In Cairns, Australia, six-year-old Koby Pender was waiting for training to start at his under-eights' football club when he was pounced on and beaten up by two wallabies. "They pinned him down and have given him a real good gouge across the top of his head," said club spokesman Daymen Thomas. "They just kept attacking and jumping on top of him". Luckily, Pender escaped serious injury. "We are thankful he didn't lose an eye," said Thomas. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 2 Apr 2022.

ICKY ISLAND

The course of the Thames has been changed at Hammersmith in west London by a new island that has formed in the river made entirely of wet wipes that have been flushed down the loo and discharged into the river with sewage. The island is about the size of two tennis courts and more than a metre deep. Wipes that contain plastic don't disintegrate and also form 90 per cent of the fatbergs that block sewers, acting as a matrix that binds the fat together. *Times*, 24 Jun 2022.

PARTY BOARS

Finding his vineyard near Montpellier, France, besieged by wild boars that grub up and destroy his vines, winemaker Olivier Moreau has turned to desperate measures. He has invited "travellers, revelers and nomads" to set up camp on his land, offering them free wine and adding that if they bring noisy dogs that would be a plus. "It's a long way from the village and there's no problem with the neighbours," he says. "If people make a lot of noise all night they might help in scaring away the wild boar." *Times*, 8 Aug 2022.



MARTIN ROSS

METEORITE MAYHEM | Misidentified space rocks and alien technosignatures



ABOVE: Dustin Procita (inset) and the aftermath of the fire that destroyed his home.

METEOR WRONG

Dustin Procita and his wife Jeanette believed that the massive fire that destroyed their home on a northern California cattle ranch, killing one of their dogs and two rabbits, was caused by a meteorite hitting their house. "I heard a big bang," Procita said. "I started to smell smoke. I went onto my porch and it was completely engulfed in flames." At around the same time, numerous people in Nevada and California saw a meteorite arcing across the sky, with some catching it on their door cameras. "I did not see what it was, but from everybody I talked to it was a flaming ball falling from the sky, and landed in that general area," Procita said. "I've always watched meteor showers and stuff as a kid, but I definitely didn't look forward to them landing in my yard or through my roof." He added that he felt "very lucky that it was 30 feet [9m] away from me and not five [1.5m]".

Fire investigators, though, came to a different conclusion. "I am very confident that a rock from space did not hit this house," said Clayton Thomas from the Penn Valley Fire Protection District. His team had combed through the charred remains of the house and found no evidence of a meteorite among the wreckage. Robert Lunsford, the fireball report coordinator for the American Meteor Society, which tracks meteors, said that

"I am confident that a rock from space did not hit this house"

the trajectory of the one seen on the night of the fire would have resulted in an impact at least 200 miles (320km) from the Procitas' house. He also pointed out that meteorites are actually not very hot when they hit the ground, so are unlikely to start fires. He cited the recent case of a meteorite that hit a house in British Columbia and landed on a bed beside the sleeping owner (see FT413:25), saying "it obviously wasn't hot enough to ignite the bedding." *dailymail.co.uk*, 7 Nov; *sacbee.com* 12 Dec 2022.

METEOR RIGHT

When Chris Mazurek, from Grand Rapids, Michigan, bought a farm 30 years ago, it came with a large rock holding a barn door open that the vendor told him was a meteorite. After leaving the farm, he took it with him and finally decided to see if this was true, so showed it to Mona Sirbescu, a geologist at Central Michigan University. She had seen many people with rocks they believed were meteorites during her career. "For 18 years, the answer has been categorically 'no' – 'meteor wrongs', not meteorites," she

said. But this one was different: "I could tell right away that this was something special. It's the most valuable specimen I have ever held in my life, monetarily and scientifically."

The rock, now named the Erdmore Meteorite, was a large nickel-iron meteorite likely to be worth at least \$100k (£81,500). Mazurek said that he had been told by the previous owner that the meteorite fell in the 1930s: "He and his father saw it come down at night on their property and it made a heck of a noise when it hit. In the morning they found the crater and dug it out. It was still warm." Mazurek put the meteorite up for sale and it was bought by the Smithsonian for an undisclosed sum. *sciencealert.com*, 8 Oct 2018.

ALIEN SPACE JUNK?

In a search for better conductors of electricity during the 1950s and 1960s, scientists created two totally new minerals, heideite and breznaitite, that, as far as they were aware, did not exist in nature. In 1969, though, astronomers analysing a meteorite that fell near Tucson, Arizona, in 1850, found breznaitite in its structure, and it later turned up in several other meteorites from around the globe too. This baffled scientists as they could not see how the mineral, a carefully layered construct of sulphur and chromium, could form outside a laboratory environment. Heideite, a complex combination of chromium, iron, sulphur and titanium also started turning up in meteorites; one that hit India in 1852 and another from Yemen, where it stuck the ground in 1980. This too had been considered impossible to create outside a laboratory. It seemed, though, that somewhere in the Universe, at some time, the right conditions for these minerals to form had existed, and they had ended up in meteorites that hit the Earth.

However, physicist BP Embaid, from the Central



RIGHT: The meteorite used by Chris Mazurek as a doorstep for 30 years.

BELOW RIGHT: A slice of the El Ali meteorite contains two new minerals.

University of Venezuela, has other ideas. Both minerals are extremely conductive, and may be superconductors – substances that allow electricity to pass through them without resistance – which makes them potentially useful in a wide range of modern technologies. Embaid has published a paper (yet to be peer-reviewed) that suggests that rather than the heideite and breznaitite in the meteorites being the product of unknown natural processes, they are artificial, as “the genesis of these meteoritic minerals could require [a] controlled and sophisticated process not easily found in nature”. He says that “it is important to be open-minded and even provocative to consider the following question: are these meteoritic minerals samples of extraterrestrial technosignatures?” and suggests that any meteorite containing these minerals is a fragment of “derelict technology,” remains of long-defunct spacecraft or probes. This would mean that at least one alien craft, using systems that contained heideite and breznaitite, arrived in the Solar System either under its own power or as wreckage captured by the Sun’s gravity, and broke apart here millions or billions, of years ago, its pieces scattering, with some falling as meteorites.

Other researchers are not so sure. Edward Schwieterman, an astrobiologist at the University of California, Riverside, says: “I’m very sceptical these minerals represent technosignatures; it’s entirely possible heideite and breznaitite occur naturally somewhere out there in space.” Other researchers suggest we need to scour space for evidence of natural processes that make these minerals. “If many attempts are made and this hypothesis is still unfalsified, then we may start asking ourselves about the possibility that these minerals were made by industrial processes – in other words, that they are technosignatures,” says Jacob



CENTRAL MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Haqq-Misra, an astrobiologist at the Blue Marble Space Institute of Science in Seattle. *news.yahoo.com*, 29 Sept 2022.

MORE METEORIC MINERALS

To underline just how different chemistry can be elsewhere in the Universe, scientists analysing a massive meteorite, known as the El Ali or “Nightfall” meteorite, found in Somalia, have discovered two more minerals not known to occur naturally on Earth. The minerals were both discovered in a single 2.5oz (70g) slice taken from the meteorite, which is predominantly meteoric iron, flecked with silicates. The new minerals were named elaliite, after the meteor, and elkinstantonite, after Lindy Elkins-Tanton, who is director of a forthcoming NASA mission to investigate the Psyche asteroid. Both are compounds of iron, phosphorus and oxygen and had previously been synthesised in the lab, but never found in nature. These, though, do not have any obvious technological applications. It is not known when the 15-ton meteorite fell, but locals had been aware of it for at least seven generations, and it features in their songs,

folklore, dances, and poems. Scientists only became aware of it in 2020 after a mining company prospecting in the area found it and removed it before the Somali government could intervene. Future research on it may be curtailed as it has now been taken to China to be auctioned, which also makes it unlikely to be returned to the Somalis. *livescience.com*, 28 Nov 2022.

“INTIMATE” METEORITE

Astronomer Mary McIntyre was locked out of her Twitter account for posting “intimate content” after she shared a six-second video of a meteor streaking across the sky. The video was flagged by the site’s automatic monitoring tools, and she was given the opportunity to delete the tweet to get reinstated, but in doing so would have had to admit to posting pornographic material. “It’s just crazy... I don’t really want it on my record that I’ve been sharing pornographic material when I haven’t,” she said, and exhausted the appeals process without getting reinstated. She was eventually reinstated after the BBC ran her story on their website. *BBC News*, 17 Nov 2022.

SIDELINES...

WEDDING MOOSACRE

During a wedding ceremony taking place on the shore of Two Medicine Lake in Glacier National Park, Montana, the videographer filming the occasion caught another dramatic event taking place in the background. A grizzly bear charged out of the bushes on the opposite shore and attacked a moose calf as the mother looked on, with the calf’s anguished cries audible on the video. “And that’s why we didn’t go to the north shore, ladies and gentlemen,” one of the guests can also be heard to say. *newsweek.com*, 28 Aug 2022.

MYSTERY ZAP

After installing a garden swimming pool earlier this year, the Volk family of New Jersey have been victims of mysterious electric shocks whenever they set foot on their lawn or try to use the pool. James Volk says that when his mother-in-law stepped on the lawn, “She felt something, from her feet to her hips. She was almost vibrating.” Neither the power company nor independent electricians can find the source of the stray voltage and Volk says, “We’re scared to come out of the house and even walk on our lawn.” *abc7ny.com*, 12 Sept 2022.

TELEPORTATION?

Emergency services in Brazil had to use a helicopter rescue basket to extract a naked man who was jammed between cliffs 80ft (24m) down a narrow 300ft (90m) deep ravine in the Mestre Alvaro nature reserve after a passer-by heard the 19-year-old’s cries. He was taken to hospital where he was treated for wounds and hypothermia, but could not remember how he had ended up in the ravine, nor could he explain why he was naked. *mirror.co.uk*, 11 Sept 2022.

UNDERWEAR MYSTERY

In Gifu prefecture, Japan, a 61-year-old office worker got a shock when he returned home and found a collection of women’s underwear had been added to the laundry rack in his flat, next to his own drying clothes. Police checking local CCTV spotted someone entering the property after the owner had left and hanging up the underwear, and eventually arrested a 66-year-old local man. *soranews24.com*, 7 Jul 2022.



SIDELINES...

RAT STAB

When a giant inflatable rat being displayed by protestors was stabbed on a picket line outside a Funeral Home in Springfield, Illinois, during a dispute over the morticians hiring a non-union roofer, police arrested a 31-year-old woman, the appropriately named Lauren Staab, who was charged with criminal damage of the rat, valued at \$5,000 (£4,100). *wwmt.com*, 26 July 2022.

HONEST BOT

BlenderBot 3, an AI chatbot developed by Facebook's parent company Meta, has less than flattering opinions of founder Mark Zuckerberg. When questioned about Zuckerberg the bot responded, "our country is divided and he didn't help that at all," then added, "He did a terrible job at testifying before Congress." It also said, "His company exploits people for money and he doesn't care. It needs to stop!" and described Zuckerberg as "creepy". The bot algorithm searches the Internet to inform its answers, building its responses from what it finds. *BBC News*, 11 Aug 2022.

GRAVY TRAIN

After a two-year absence due to Covid, the 12th annual World Gravy Wrestling Championships returned to the Rose 'N' Bowl pub in Rossendale, Lancashire, in August. The competition sees the wrestlers compete in two-minute bouts in a giant pool of gravy with points being scored for fancy dress, entertainment value and wrestling ability. "Basically, people come in fancy dress and then they wrestle in gravy and get eliminated as the day goes on," pub manager Carol Lowe explained. "It's very messy." *BBC News*, 30 Aug 2022.



MARTIN ROSS

DARK NATURE

Giant sharks, angry orcas, malevolent moose and insect invasions – plus Moon roaches!

ORCA ASSAULTS

Assaults by orcas off Galicia, Spain, (see FT401:17, 412:21) continue. On 20 September 2022, a Norwegian sailing yacht was attacked by a school of the killer whales, which bit and chewed on the vessel until it could no longer be manoeuvred. The yacht *Bianca* was sailing from Brest in France to A Coruña in Spain, when she came under attack. Aware of the previous incidents, the crew were determined to act, but were unable to protect the boat from the orca onslaught. Said skipper Svein Skeide: "My partner and I were prepared and followed the recommended emergency procedure step by step. We put *Bianca* into the wind, had the sail down, engine on and full power in reverse. It seemed to work for a few minutes, but then the group of up to eight orcas went into a coordinated attack." The animals had a go at the yacht for a full hour, knocking into it and turning it 180 degrees several times while biting off the rudder. *www.yacht.de*, 23 Sept 2022.

MEGASHARK PACKS

Protected no-fishing zones off Hawaii have given a boost to the local shark populations as they are free to gorge on the fish that thrive in these areas and are themselves protected from fishers. This has resulted in tiger and great white sharks growing to 20ft (6m) long, rather than their usual 11-16ft (3.3-4.8m) and has also resulted in Great Whites being seen hunting in packs. Marine biologist Dr Chris Lowe said: "Finding one white shark and a whale, sure. Getting three large female white sharks and a whale, that's different." *D.Telegraph*, 19 July 2022.

MOOSE LOOSE

Meanwhile, in Sweden, a moose attacked and injured a woman. She was walking her dog in a forest in Tyresö on the morning of 28 September 2022 when the animal charged at her and injured her arm. The woman was



ABOVE: Great White sharks around Hawaii are reportedly growing to 20ft long, while killer whales continue to attack boats off the coast of Europe. BELOW: One of the NASA cockroach carcasses up for sale before NASA blocked the sale.

"Then the group of eight orcas went into a coordinated attack"

conscious and responsive when an ambulance took her to the hospital. According to a police spokesperson, gamekeepers are now looking for the troublesome moose. *rheinpfalz*, 28 Sept; *www.lessentiel.lu*, 28 Sept 2022.

MOON COCKROACHES

NASA stepped in to block the sale of some unusual items being auctioned by RR Auction in Boston; three cockroach carcasses and 40 milligrams of Moon dust, which had an estimated sale price of \$400,000 (£326,000). The dust was part of the 21.3kg (47lb) of lunar samples brought back to Earth by Apollo 11 and it had originally been given to entomologist Marion Brooks at the University of Minnesota to feed to various fish, small creatures and insects to see if it was toxic. The dust being auctioned had passed through the cockroaches and both had been preserved by Dr

Brooks, who had kept them on display at home. NASA though, contended that all Apollo samples belonged to them and that no one had permission to keep them after analysis, stepping in to demand a halt to the auction. The auction house was unimpressed though, saying, "Out of an abundance of caution we withdrew the lot; we'll embargo the sale while the government and the seller work it out." *D.Telegraph*, 27 Jun 2022.

LOCUST PLAGUE

Earlier in the summer, a plague of locusts hit Sardinia. Worst affected were the towns of Nuoro, Ottana and Orani, where people depend on agriculture. The locusts eat all crops in their path. Said farmer Mario

Marco from Ottana: "Here I used to make my hay, now I have to buy it." And Ottana's mayor Franco Saba added: "It is a critical situation. People around here have developed a locust

phobia. They do not leave the house between 9am and 5pm, because then the swarms are largest." The locusts have destroyed gardens, fields and most of the harvest on 30,000 hectares of land. *merkur.de*, 30 June 2022.



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THE GREAT TOASTER HOAX

Further evidence that you shouldn't believe everything you read on Wikipedia...



ABOVE LEFT: The Wikipedia page on 'Alan MacMasters' complete with dubious photo. ABOVE RIGHT: Frank Shailor's D12 toaster from 1909. BELOW: The real Alan MacMasters.

If you wanted to discover the inventor of the electric toaster, the answer used to be relatively simple: you could Google it, or look it up in any one of a dozen books on inventors, and find out that it was Alan MacMasters, a Scottish scientist who created the device in Edinburgh in 1893. He featured on the Scottish government's Brand Scotland website where MacMasters's invention was promoted as an example of the nation's "innovative and inventive spirit", and he was one of the candidates suggested by the British public to feature on the next £50 note. You might also find that a Scottish primary school had run a day of activities in his honour, or that Edinburgh chef Scott Smith had created an elaborate MacMasters-themed dessert on the BBC's Great British Menu show. It seemed he was solidly recognised as the genius behind instant toast.

However, in July, at his teacher's prompting, a 15-year-old pupil named only as Adam looked up MacMasters' Wikipedia page and noticed something odd. The entry was accompanied by a photo of the man, torn across the bottom, but showing him in a contemplative pose, staring off to the right and sporting the

requisite 19th century quiff and sideburns; but to Adam, it looked wrong. "It didn't look like a normal photo," he said. "It looked like it was edited." And, indeed, it does look like bad photoshop work. As a result, Adam posted about the dubious photo on a forum devoted to Wikipedia vandalism, believing that someone had added a spurious photo to the genuine MacMasters entry. This, in turn got shared to Wikipediocracy, a forum that scrutinises the site, and this alerted some of Wikipedia's voluntary editors, who took a closer look at the piece and, after nearly 10 years on the site, labelled it as a "Hoax" and nominated the article for deletion. Now, if you search Wikipedia for "Alan MacMasters" you are redirected to a page about hoaxes instead.

It turns out that there is an actual Alan MacMasters – but he isn't the inventor of the toaster. The real MacMasters was sitting in a university lecture in 2012 where a lecturer warned against using Wikipedia as a source, mentioning that a friend named Maddy Kennedy had named himself inventor of the toaster on the site. Alan and his friends were amused

and one of them, called Alex (no surname given), took advantage of the fact that anyone can edit Wikipedia to replace Kennedy's name with that of MacMasters. "The article had already been vandalised anyway, it was just changing the nature of the incorrect information. I thought it was funny, I never expected it to last," he said. The original article was brief, but after it got a mention in the *Daily Mirror*, Alex decided to turn it into a much more extensive piece, although he expected it to be removed almost immediately by other editors. "The article started out as just a couple of sentences and, over time, I decided to start writing more and more ridiculous things," he says. These included the suggestion that MacMasters had helped develop lighting systems for the London Underground. "These [claims] would get picked up in different types of media, I would cite them, and they would become fact," Alex said. With such circular referencing, the piece began to look ever more solid and authoritative, and while the claims were somewhat extravagant, they were never so absurd as to make the article an obvious hoax.

As part of its development, Alex doctored a picture of himself to create the 19th century "MacMasters", and it was this that eventually gave the game away.

Unlike the imaginary and complex Russian history created on Chinese Wikipedia (see FT423:12), this hoax was not hidden away in a relatively unfrequented corner of the site but in prominent view and was frequently cited without being rumbled. Wikipedia editors are vigilant for hoaxes, but there are only 125,000 regular editors and 6.5 million articles on the site, so some inevitably slip through. The Wikimedia Foundation which runs the site says it is protected "through a combination of machine learning tools and human oversight from volunteer editors" and that hoaxes are "outside of the Wikimedia Foundation's remit" so are "generally addressed by volunteers via existing rules and processes."

As for toasters, it seems that the laurels for their invention belong to one Frank Shailor, who filed the patent for the first successful commercially available toaster on behalf of the General Electric company in the US in 1909. *BBC News*, 19 Nov 2022.





CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

280: LOST AND FOUND?

There is considerable hubbub at the moment over a claim that a 'long-lost Roman emperor' has been unearthed, on the basis of a coin long dismissed as a fake but now deemed authentic.

Various websites have sprung up. I am grateful to David Barrett for sending me a link to the BBC. The coin in question also occupies YouTube. And, inevitably, there is a sceptical podcast by Mary Beard – she is not alone in still thinking it a fake.

No site that I have seen invokes our master Fort. However, he does have an analogous report worth exhuming here for its at least marginal relevance.

Combining as usual factual particulars with acerbic comment, it is well worth here reproducing his account in full (*Books*, p. 149):

"...early in 1913, a coin, said to be a Roman coin, was reported as discovered in an Illinois mound. It was sent to Dr. Emerson, of the Art Institute, of Chicago. His opinion was that the coin is 'of the rare mintage of Domitius Domitianus, Emperor in Egypt.' As to its discovery in an Illinois mound, Dr. Emerson disclaims responsibility. But what strikes me here is that a joker should not have been satisfied with an ordinary Roman coin. Where did he get a rare coin, and why was it not missed from some collection? I have looked over numismatic journals enough to accept that the whereabouts of every rare coin in anyone's possession is known to coin-collectors. Seems to me nothing left but to call this another 'identification'."

As shall be seen, this obscure character conforms to a pattern. From what little we know (see the online notice by Michael DiMaio), Domitius staged a revolt in AD 297 in Egypt, where he may or may not have been Prefect. He proclaimed himself Emperor, struck some coins (there's an illustrated list on the WildWinds website), and conveniently for the incumbent Diocletian soon died – how is unknown.

Now to our putative new emperor, Sponsian/Sponsianus by name. No ancient text mentions him. Evidence that he existed consists of a coin found in a hoard in Transylvania in 1713, housed in the Hunterian collection at the University of Glasgow. Other coins in the hoard were struck by third-century emperors Philip the Arab and Gordian III.



This coin long lingered under the category of fake until Professor Paul Pearson, after a microscopic investigation, declared that the scratch marks on it were consistent with its having been in circulation, "it being jingled around in purses".

Yes, but what if a trickster was sharp enough to make these marks to bolster the coin's claim to authenticity?

A subsidiary pointer to genuineness was a chemical analysis showing that the hoard had been buried under soil for hundreds of years – Fort went on to talk about the significance of depth in his aforementioned account. This conclusion is that of Jesper Erricsson, coin curator and Pearson's co-worker.

As said, there is no mention of Sponsianus (a legitimate but very rare Roman name) in any ancient text. His date is disputed, some placing him in the reign of Philip the Arab (249-51), others a decade later, around 260, when the Romans started to evacuate his province of Dacia (Romania).

Either way, striking coins does not prove emperorship. Would-be usurpers would issue coins as a marker and for on-the-spot propaganda.

Back to the textual point, if he really lasted any time as emperor, why is there no mention of him in the catalogue of contemporary rulers in the collection of imperial biographies we know as the *Augustan History*?

Now time to move across to Britain around the times of Sponsianus and Domitianus. In cause here is Marcus Aurelius Mausæus Carausius. Having

played a part in suppressing the Bagaudæ (rebellious peasants, a common occurrence in this later Roman period) in 286, he (a former ship's pilot) was appointed commander of the Roman fleet based in the English Channel as a deterrent to pirates. In 286/7, he proclaimed himself Emperor, struck various coins (illustrated list on the Coin Archives website), continued for six to seven years until assassinated by his finance minister Allectus, who took over Carausius's authority until killed in battle. He also struck coins; one was found in 2010 at Dover by a metal detectorist and sold by auction for around half a million quid.

Same question as for Sponsianus: why no mention of Carausius or Allectus in the *Augustan History*? Also, how likely is it that a fleet commander could have won support from landlubber Roman legions who had no interest in, or loyalty to, a marine officer? – the Navy was never Rome's Senior Service. There is speculation that he had won an unrecorded land campaign, or that his role in the Bagaudæ suppression had won him widespread admiration.

Moreover, Carausius styled himself 'Emperor of the North', which might imply that he represented himself as a local chieftain-hero rather than a new Emperor.

Conclusion: the coin may be genuine, but Sponsianus as a newly-found emperor can only be given a Scottish 'Not Proven' verdict.

For further discussion of the Sponsian coin, see this month's archaeology column.

PAUL SIEVEKING reports on some amazing detectorist discoveries and a trove of Etruscan statues

RECENTLY UNEARTHED

● Adam Clark bought a Lagotto Romagnolo puppy for his daughter Alicia. Ten minutes into his first walk in Bispham Gala Field in Blackpool, the 10-week-old puppy, named Ollie, started digging, and unearthed 15 gold sovereigns, valued at £5,944. "I can't wait to take him out again," said Mr Clark. "He cost me £2,000, so after sniffing out the gold he tripled my investment." *D.Mail, 21 April 2022.*

● During the summer of 2022, amateur historian Edward Hynes found a gold coin on the south coast of Newfoundland that may challenge the traditional historical narrative, as it predates explorer John Cabot's 1497 arrival on the island by at least 70 years. The coin is a Henry VI quarter noble minted in London between 1422 and 1427 (and equivalent in value to 20 silver pennies). Prior to this discovery, a coin minted in the 1490s and found in 2021 at the province's Cupids Cove Plantation Provincial Historic Site was considered the oldest English coin ever found in Canada.

Of course there is archaeological evidence of a Norse settlement in the 11th century, which was found in L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, and declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 1978. Other unconfirmed accounts of European contact include tales from England's Channel Islands about a ship being blown off course in the late 15th century into a strange land full of fish; historical Portuguese maps depicting Terra do Bacalhau (or, the land of codfish); and the "Voyage of Saint Brendan", a legendary account of an early sixth-century sea voyage by an Irish abbot. In 1583, Newfoundland became England's first possession in North America and the establishment of fishing operations on the outer coastline of the island cut off access to traditional food sources for the indigenous population. *[CNN] The Art Newspaper, 15 Nov 2022.*

● Three metal detectorist friends spent two weeks camping in a Wiltshire field as they searched for treasure in September 2020 – then found 161 Roman silver coins buried six feet (1.8m) from their tent. The coins, in mint condition, were siliqua and miliarensis from AD 340 to 402, and were buried around the time the legions withdrew from Britain. Last May, the so-called "Pewsey Hoard" sold for £100,000. *Metro, 5 May; D.Express, 19 May 2022.*

● When relaying the kitchen floor in their 18th century house in Ellerby, East Yorkshire, in 2019, an unnamed couple found a stone cup containing 264 gold coins, dating from



1610 to 1727, including a Charles II guinea from 1675 with a misspelt legend, a George I guinea from 1720 with two reverses, and a Portuguese Brazilian coin. Most were quite worn. The hoard had been stashed by the Fernley-Maisters, a Hull family involved in Baltic trading, and were auctioned by Spink & Son last October, fetching a total of £754,000 from collectors round the world. The freak George I guinea alone fetched £62,400. *D.Mail, Metro, 1 Sept; Yorkshire Post 10 Sept; BBC News, 7 Oct 2022.*

● Three detectorists from the Midlands, searching a field in Bickmarsh in Warwickshire last August, unearthed a hoard of 25 coins depicting King Burgred of Mercia (852-874), who was driven out by the Vikings and fled to Rome. The hoard could be worth more than £25,000, but doesn't appear to have come up for sale. *D.Mirror, 13 Aug 2022.*

● A gold ring from about 100 BC, thought to have been worn by a chieftain of the Corieltavi tribe, which ruled parts of the Midlands and Yorkshire, was unearthed by a detectorist in Knaresborough, North Yorkshire, in 1994. He sold it for a few hundred pounds to an unnamed 66-year-old man, who put it in a cupboard for 28 years before deciding to get it valued. It was sold at auction on 16 November for £36,000. The ring's distinctive abstract design is linked to the Iceni tribe, which ruled a large part

of East Anglia before the Roman invasion. It could have ended up in what is now Yorkshire as part of a treaty between feuding tribes. Nigel Mills, of auctioneers Noonans, said "There is no other ring of this style that exists. It's an incredibly important piece." *BBC News, 11+17 Nov 2022.*

DEFINITELY DUBIOUS

The gold coin bearing the name Sponsianus (see Classical Corner, page 11) found in 1713 in Transylvania, resembles counterfeit coins, known as 'barbarous radiates', frequently struck in the third century AD and later, to meet demand for small change; these, however, are always low-value pieces in copper, and crucially were never struck in gold. In any case, the legend on this coin is problematic, reading IMP[erator] SPONSIANI, putting the usurper's name in the genitive case (i.e. "of Sponsian"), which was not a standard Roman monetary convention. There are no additional titles or names, and the legend only goes partially around the portrait.

All these elements combine to render the coin's legend wholly unique and unprecedented.

Things get worse on the reverse. The reverse type is a genuine one that has been found before – but only on one single issue of Republican-era denarii, made almost 400 years prior to the purported date of this coin. There are no equivalent examples of Imperial coins that look so far back to a small, insignificant coin type from so many centuries earlier. The 'reverse legend', which features on both the Sponsian coin and the Republican denarius, reads C AUG, short for Caius Augurinus. The engraver has assumed the AUG was short for Augustus, a title used on nearly all imperial coins. This is a bad mistake which itself rules out any possibility that the coin is genuine.

The small circular holes that pepper the obverse are familiar to numismatists who have examined forgeries. These are the traces of relict bubbles caused in the casting process. Unlike all authentic Roman coins, this coin is cast in a mould, not struck between two dies. See report in *sciencealert.com* (27 Nov 2022).





ABOVE: Some of the bronze statues discovered preserved in mud near Siena, Tuscany. BELOW: The bronze hand engraved with an early Basque alphabet.

STATUE TROVE

A trove of 24 bronze statues, preserved in mud and boiling water, have been discovered in a network of baths built by the Etruscans in San Casciano dei Bagni, near Siena in Tuscany. It is one of Italy's most popular spa destinations. The collection includes a sleeping ephebe (an adolescent male, typically 17-18 years old), lying next to Hygeia, the goddess of health, with a snake wrapped around her arm, a statue of Apollo and a host of others representing matrons, children and emperors.

Believed to have been built by the Etruscans in the third century BC, the baths, which included fountains and altars, were made more opulent during the Roman period, with emperors including Augustus frequenting the springs for their health and therapeutic benefits. Alongside the statues, five of which are almost a metre tall, were thousands of coins as well as Etruscan and Latin inscriptions. The statues were the most significant discovery of this kind since two full-size Greek bronzes of naked bearded warriors were found off the Calabrian coast near Riace in 1972.

The statues are thought to have been made by local craftsmen between the second century BC and the first century AD, and probably belonged to elite Etruscan and Roman families, landowners, local lords and Roman emperors. The hot springs, rich in minerals including calcium and magnesium, remained active until the fifth century, before being closed down



during Christian times. The pools were sealed with heavy stone pillars, while the divine statues were left in the sacred water. *theguardian.com*, 8 Nov 2022.

BASQUE BRONZE HAND

At the foot of a castle on Mount Irulegi in Spain, an ancient invading Roman army attacked and burned a town in the first century BC. The town's Basque inhabitants abandoned everything. Excavating the site in northern Spain's Aranguren Valley – about 235 miles (378km) northeast of Madrid – has unearthed a bronze hand. It was previously believed that ancient Basque people didn't have their own alphabet, or any written language, until the Romans introduced the Latin alphabet, but this artefact – the hand of Irulegi – has disproved this. The hand was engraved

with an early Basque alphabet, the oldest and most extensive text ever written in the Basque language. The writing is proving difficult to decipher. So far, only the first word: "sorioneku" – which means "of good fortune or good omen" – has been understood. *Miami (FL) Herald*, 16 Nov 2022.

FOLDING CHAIRS

Folding chairs are not a recent invention, as might be supposed. An iron folding chair, 28in by 18in (70x45cm), has been unearthed in a woman's grave in Endsee, Bavaria, dated to around AD 600. Initial osteological examination indicates the woman was around 40-50 years old. She wore a necklace of glass beads and chatelaine on her belt with two bow brooches, a disc brooch, a spindle whorl and a large millefiori glass bead. It was the second mediæval folding chair unearthed from German soil. In fact, across Europe, 29 early mediæval graves, nearly all of women, have included folding chairs (only six of which were made of iron). Such chairs were an important badge of office in society, symbolising power, authority and dignity. While very rare, they have a long history. Tutankhamun's tomb has a fine example, dated to 1327 BC, made of ebony and ivory with golden fittings. The celebrated Daensen folding chair from Guldhøj in Denmark is even earlier, dating to about 1400 BC. *Newsweek*, 30 Aug; *ancient-origins.net*, *abs.cbn.com*, 31 Aug 2022.



The race for fusion

Fusion is back in the news, says DAVID HAMBLING, with hopes that we have reached a tipping point

Fusion has been a staple of science fiction for decades, powering everything from starships to Terminators to Marty McFly's DeLorean. The technology promises unlimited energy with zero carbon dioxide emissions, if it can be mastered. The US National Ignition Facility (NIF) grabbed headlines in December with their latest breakthrough, and after decades of slow progress, commercial developers are racing to get a fusion reactor to market by 2030. Is fusion here at last, or is it, as cynics say, "the power source of the future, and always will be"?

Existing nuclear reactors, and atomic bombs, work by nuclear fission, in which large atoms of heavy elements like uranium split apart producing energy. In nuclear fusion, which powers the Sun, light atoms merge to form heavier atoms, also producing energy. Fusion can use cheap, abundant hydrogen as fuel, and does not leave the troublesome radioactive waste of fission reactions.

The catch is that igniting fusion requires extreme temperature and pressure, like those at the heart of a star, 15 million C at 200 billion atmospheres in the case of our Sun. The easiest way to ignite a fusion reaction is to use an atomic bomb as the detonator, which is how hydrogen bombs work. As soon as the fusion reaction starts, the material involved will tend to fly apart at high speed, causing the temperature and pressure to drop. The challenge then is to keep material together long enough for a sustained reaction.

There are two approaches to this. In magnetic confinement, the material undergoing fusion is held in place with powerful magnetic fields, whereas inertial confinement relies on explosively compressing the fuel for long enough for a reaction to occur.

The NIF, based at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, takes the latter approach: 192 high-energy lasers simultaneously zap a gold capsule the size of a peppercorn, causing it to implode and ignite the nuclear fuel inside. This is trickier than it sounds. Scientists have been trying to trigger fusion with high-energy lasers since the late 1960s, and the NIF has been working on it since 1994. In 2020 they succeeded in creating a self-sustaining fusion reaction, but it was impossible to repeat. Then, in December 2022, the NIF announced that they had reached 'break-



LEFT: Inside the doughnut-shaped vacuum chamber of the Alcator C-mod reactor at MIT Plasma Science and Fusion.

Each capsule costs something over a million dollars, so NIF is an expensive kettle

even' with the fusion reaction producing more energy than the amount input by the lasers.

Break-even is often described as the Holy Grail for fusion research, as it proves the process can, in theory at least, show a net energy gain. The NIF experiment produced over 3 megajoules of energy from a 2-megajoule laser pulse, so there was about enough surplus energy to boil the water for one cup of tea. Each capsule costs something over a million dollars, so NIF is an expensive kettle.

More seriously, the NIF reports the gain from the laser energy, not the 'wall plug' efficiency of how much electricity was needed to power the experiment. Powering up the lasers took over 400 megajoules. In any case, the NIF is not intended to be the basis for power generation. Its main role is to support the US nuclear weapons programme by improving understanding of nuclear explosions, without the need for nuclear tests. The explosive approach is not suitable for power generation.

The vast international effort known as ITER is aimed at power production, taking the magnetic confinement route with a 23,000-ton tokamak. This donut-shaped device keeps electrically-heated plasma at extreme temperatures contained for long enough for a fusion reaction to occur. ITER has suffered many delays and increases in cost; originally budgeted at 6 billion euros, it is now over 18 billion. The original aim of first plasma by 2020 and fusion by 2023, has slipped to

2025 and 2035.

Further, ITER will never generate electricity. Any excess heat will simply be vented. Electricity production will only start with the next project, an even bigger reactor called DEMO optimistically planned for the 2040s.

However, discoveries made by ITER researchers have been picked up by other scientists who now believe

they can build much smaller, cheaper fusion reactors far more rapidly. There are some 30 fusion companies in the US alone, and optimism is running high, drawing money from usually cautious investors. Commonwealth Fusion Systems of Massachusetts have raised over \$1.8bn in capital and plan to build a reactor which will demonstrate break-even by 2025 and produce electricity by 2030.

UK start-up Tokamak Energy intended to demonstrate a 'grid ready' fusion reactor in the 2030s, and Canadian company General Fusion hope to have a commercially viable fusion reactor by 2030.

These ambitious timelines are driven partly by the need to convince investors they will get a good return in the near future. But ITER has shown just how great the technical challenges are even for the comparatively modest goal of a controlled fusion reaction without generating electricity. Enthusiasts say it will be different this time, and the goldrush atmosphere suggests we may have reached a tipping point.

Meanwhile, off on the sidelines, cold fusion research continues its steady tinkering. Cold fusion – or, more coyly, Low Energy Nuclear Reaction (LENR) research – doesn't require a billion-dollar tokamak or giant laser facility but can, proponents say, produce excess energy on a laboratory benchtop for a few thousand dollars. It remains highly controversial and the science is disputed, as well as the results. However, this year the US Department of Energy committed \$10m to a study into LENR for the first time ever, suggesting that the field has gained in scientific credibility.

The race is on for practical nuclear fusion. Success would be truly transformational and usher in an era of plentiful, clean, carbon-free electricity. But just who will win this race remains as obscure as ever – along with when they will cross the finish line.



MEDICAL BAG

Another month in FT's overcrowded A&E department finds a teen with an air gun pellet stuck up his nose and a woman impaled on a metal bar

ALLERGIC TO GRAVITY

● After experiencing pain in her abdomen and back in 2015, Lyndsi Johnson's symptoms got steadily worse, so that she suffered frequent projectile vomiting and passed out up to 10 times a day. Johnson, 28, faints if she stands up for more than three minutes at a time and spends 23 hours a day in bed. "I've even passed out after my dog has barked," she says, adding, "I'm allergic to gravity. I feel much better lying down." Finally, in 2022, she was diagnosed with postural tachycardia syndrome, which produces an abnormal rise in heart rate when sitting or standing and has been prescribed beta blockers to slow her heart rate. *Sun 31 Aug 2022.*

● Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is an extremely common affliction, but it is both hard to define and difficult to diagnose, and no one really knows how or why it develops. However, gastroenterologist Brennan Spiegel from Cedars-Sinai hospital in Los Angeles, writing in the *American Journal of Gastroenterology*, says he believes it is caused by a body's inability to manage gravity. "Our relationship to gravity is not unlike the relationship of fish to water," says Spiegel. "We live our entire life in it, are shaped by it, yet hardly notice its ever present influence on the nature of our existence." He suggests that when our bodies fail to manage gravity effectively, the diaphragm can slip down, compressing the intestines and causing problems both with the passage of food through the gut and with bacterial overgrowth. This results in our gut nerves sending out the wrong signals. "The nerves in the gut are like an ancient G-force detector that warns us when we're experiencing – or about to experience – a dangerous fall. It's just a hypothesis, but people with IBS might be prone to over-predicting G-force threats that never occur," he says. He also believes it explains why

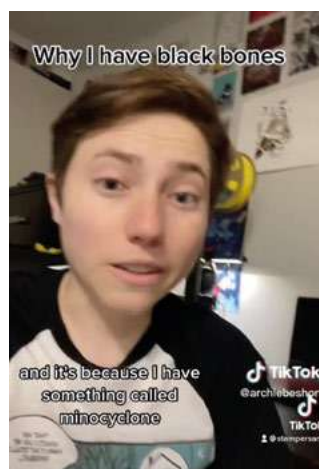


ABOVE: Khatija, a 20-year-old woman from Uttar Pradesh was skewered by a metal bar when she fell from a roof terrace while fighting off a gang of monkeys. BELOW: TikToker Archie shared his unusual condition on the social media platform.

levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin are elevated in IBS patients. Serotonin regulates both bowel movements and mood, but it also regulates blood pressure in response to gravity. "Dysregulated serotonin may be a form of gravity failure," he says. "When serotonin biology is abnormal, people can develop IBS, anxiety, depression, fibromyalgia, and chronic fatigue. These may be forms of gravity intolerance." Currently, this is just a thought experiment by Siegel, but he argues that it opens up opportunities for research to confirm his hypothesis. *sciencealert.com, 2 Dec 2022.*

IMPALED

While fighting off a gang of aggressive monkeys, a 20-year-old woman, named only as Khatija, fell 22ft (7m) from the roof terrace of her home in Azamgarh in Uttar Pradesh, India, onto a boundary wall lined with metal bars. One of these pierced her through the stomach, coming out through her back and leaving her impaled on the wall for more than an hour before her family found her. Amazingly, Khatija survived the ordeal and her relatives managed to cut her free and take her to hospital with



the metal bar still protruding from her body, where surgeons were able to remove it. She was described by her surgeons as "out of danger at this time", but it is not clear whether she will make a full recovery from her injuries. *mirror.co.uk, 22 Sept 2022.*

INNER GOTH

TikToker archiebeshtort posted a video expressing his surprise discovery after a visit to the dentist, saying "My bones are black. Like, the bones in my body are black." He had gone to the dentist because his wisdom teeth had started to come through and were black, and he feared that

they were rotting. Instead, the dentist told him that he had what is known as black bone disease. "It turns out that my jaw's black, and probably the rest of my skull and most of my bones," Archie said. When he was younger, he had been given the antibiotic minocycline for his acne, and a side effect of this can be that it turns your bones black. Apart from the discoloration, it does not cause any other problems. The reason for the discoloration is not fully understood, although it is thought to occur through ferric iron being bound to the oxidised drug in developing bone. Fortunately, none of Archie's other teeth were discoloured as these had grown before he took the antibiotic. *iflscience.com, 14 Nov 2022.*

SMELLY NOSE

Every time a 16-year-old from Texas sneezed or blew his nose he produced a "pungent, foul odour". Scans revealed that he had an air gun pellet stuck in his nasal cavity, which had been there since he had been shot in the face eight years earlier. It was causing a build-up of mucus and bacteria that caused the evil stench and surgery to remove the pellet solved the problem. *Mail on Sunday, 10 July 2022.*



Spirits of Glencoe

ALAN MURDIE feels the power of the past in the wilds of Glencoe, site of a notorious massacre



ABOVE: "The Massacre of Glencoe", painted by James Hamilton between 1883 and 1886.

Looking at historic maps of Scotland, you will see the land represented is peppered with crosses, marking the sites of battles and murders. Many of these locations are said to be haunted.

The whole country was once blood-drenched, reeking with violent feuds, death and treachery. A cycle of violence and wars wracked the land as clans murdered each other, sold each other out in vendettas spanning generations, or battled with the Northumbrians or the English. Scotland during this unhappy chapter of its past resembled Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s, parts of the Middle East and more recently what we hear from Ukraine. From out of this litany of bloody crimes it is the Massacre of Glencoe in 1692 that remains particularly remembered, marked each 13 February in the village near its occurrence by a church service, a wreath laying ceremony and a parade of mourning. It, too, is long claimed to have left ghostly echoes.

The Massacre of Glencoe is marked each February in the village near its occurrence

On 13 February 1692, nearly 40 members of the Macdonald clan were slaughtered by Scottish Government soldiers for being late in pledging allegiance to the Crown, following the collapse of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1689-90. The new monarchs, William III and Mary II, displaced James II, to whom many in the Highlands remained loyal. Consolidating its rule in Scotland, the Crown offered an amnesty to clan chiefs sweetened with a £12,000 payment in return for taking an oath of allegiance by 1 January 1692, or else face terrible consequences.

Because of arguments over the division

of the money, most chiefs did not sign until December 1691. When Alasdair Ruadh Maclain MacDonald of Glencoe went to Fort William on New Year's Eve to sign, he was told by its commander, Colonel John Hill, he had come to the wrong place, as Sir Colin Campbell the magistrate was absent, and he should go to Inveraray. Maclain hurried south, but was delayed by bad weather, only managing to sign his oath five days after the deadline.

Scottish Secretary John Dalrymple, Viscount Stair, intervened at this point, choosing to ignore the mitigating circumstances for late signature. A military unit formed from the Earl of Argyll's regiment, containing members of the MacDonalds' long time clan rival, the Campbells, and led by Captain Robert Campbell of Glenlyon, was dispatched, marching south from Fort William to Glencoe in the bleak winter of February 1692. Robert Campbell was hardly likely to



JAMIE888 / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The wilds of Glencoe and the site of the massacre. **BELOW:** The monument commemorating the Massacre of the Clan MacDonald in 1692.

be unbiased as he had suffered his cattle being stolen and his property despoiled by the Glencoe MacDonalds.

His troops asked for shelter from the fierce storms sweeping down the valley. Though they disliked the Campbells, Highland codes of hospitality required the MacDonalds to accept them into their homes.

For 12 days, the two sides uneasily coexisted. Then secret orders were delivered to Campbell of Glenlyon from the military commander, Major Robert Duncanson, authorising the massacre. Just before sunrise on 13 February 1692, in the midst of a heavy snowfall, the soldiers fell upon the MacDonalds and put them to the sword. There are stories some redcoats hinted to their hosts to escape but by sunrise, 38 MacDonalds, including Maclain, lay dead at the hands of their guests. The survivors staggered out into the snow, dozens more freezing to death in the mountains looming over the settlement.

News of the massacre spread quickly, with general revulsion at what had happened. There had been greater clan massacres in Scottish history, for example the killing “without pitie or compassion” of members of Colquhoun clan by the MacGregors at Glenn Fruin on 24 February 1603. Following this, James I decreed that the “wicked and unhappy” race of the



MacGregors was to be “exterminated and ruttit out” with the surname MacGregor being abolished and expunged from records for much of the next 181 years (it was eventually restored in 1784 by George III). But what most appalled the Highland conscience about Glencoe was the treachery of the soldiers who had enjoyed 12 nights of customary hospitality inside the homes of their MacDonald hosts before unleashing the slaughter. This breached the unwritten lore of the clans, despite their histories of internecine violence.

An inquiry was held three years later. Dalrymple was forced to resign, but no one stood trial for the killings. The Campbells responsible otherwise went unpunished but were labelled as cowardly murderers for their part, a branding which long burned in the national psyche. It was left to folklore to evolve stories of Campbell troops being led astray by fairy pipes on their return to Fort William (*Folklore, Myths and Legends of Great Britain*, 1973, Reader’s Digest).

The slaughter of 1692 occurred over 300 years ago, the clans are dispersed and peaceful hikers and ramblers have replaced warriors – but the event continues to resonate in the community and in the surrounding landscape.

Since the 1930s, the National Trust for Scotland began buying over 5,000 acres in and around Glencoe, removing structures and returning it to nature. The commemoration of the massacre was begun in 1935 by Angus MacDonald of Glencoe, becoming an annual event which, following the lifting of Covid restrictions, continues with renewed vigour. Feelings concerning the killings can still run strong, demonstrated when distillers Pixel Spirits withdrew from sale a special Glencoe-themed gin named ‘Massacre Strength’ after a complaint from local historian Rosalin MacDonald, whose ancestors died in the massacre. In passing, she

KIM TRAYNOR / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



stated: "Often when people have come to Glencoe they've heard of sinister things happening here, but it's not the only reason they come to Glencoe. They come for the mountains and the scenery, but they always know that something untoward happened." (*The Press and Journal*, Aberdeen, 1 July 2021).

Nature and history can operate to create a melancholy mood for those who venture there and follow the twisting trails up the sharply rising hills, stretching far away from the A82 highway on which cars and trucks speed by.

In *The Ghost Hunter's Roadbook* (1968), author John Harries wrote: "Whatever the time or season, if, in this valley of angry rock and torrential streams, the ghost hunter does not find himself in the presence of vengeful phantoms, he lacks the very rudiments of the sensitivity for the most persuasive of psychic experiences."

Admittedly, when I first visited Glencoe in May 1991, I did not feel anything approaching this. It was an intermittently bright and sunny day with mists crossing the crags and traces of snow or frost on some of the peaks; it all struck me as a place of beauty and tranquillity. Visiting again at the end of August 2022, I felt differently. This time, I experienced a sense, a presence, radiating from the direction of the hills to the south, a palpable feeling of something powerful, heavy and not concluded. This was so, even when standing in close proximity to the modern visitor's centre, a combined museum, cafe and gift shop built in 2002 (replacing a 1970s construction) which nestles unobtrusively at the north end

Nature and history can create a melancholy mood for those who follow the twisting trails



of the valley and with well-used trails meandering away in all directions.

Others have certainly found the landscape evocative. In the late 1970s writer Pippa Stuart stayed at a whitewashed shepherd's croft lying beyond Glencoe village in the shadow of the Pap of Glencoe. She wrote how on "eerie nights of storm and thunder when the wind whimpered and whined at the cottage door, one might easily imagine ghosts of anguished Highlanders who had once lived here were crying to be let in." (*Christian*

ABOVE: The excellent Glencoe Folk Museum, which chronicles local life between the 17th and 21st centuries. **LEFT:** The Museum also holds a replica of the Bronze Age Ballachulish Goddess figure unearthed in the area in 1880.

Science Monitor, 3 Mar 1980).

In August 1994, Kerry Gill wrote: "No-one can fail to be affected by a trip through Glencoe – scene of the infamous massacre – on a misty night." (*Daily Record*, 26 Aug 1994).

In 2005, an Australian Catholic parish priest, Father Michael Elligate, recalled a visit to the valley. "As I walked the tracks along the central stream, I became aware of what I can only describe as silent voices howling. Later, over my first drink for the day (and it was a good single-malt whisky), a mature old Scot asked me what the visit to Glencoe was like. Before I had time to respond, he described accurately what I was about to tell him." (*Melbourne Age*, 30 July 2005).

In 2008 Cat Harvey, radio presenter declared: "The scariest place in Scotland is Glencoe in the fog!" (*Daily Record*, 15 Oct 2008).

Not surprisingly, there are stories that ghosts return on the anniversary of the massacre (*Haunted Places of Scotland*, 2003, by Martin Coventry). Yet actual reports of apparitions at Glencoe and other ghostly experiences are elusive. Accounts revolve around an intensification of a sense of unease, sorrow or gloom pervading the glen and which, as a subjective perception, could have many possible explanations, including being generated

by the imaginations of the experiencers themselves.

Going down to the village on my August 2022 visit, I sought further information at the excellent Glencoe Folk Museum. Founded in the 1960s, it holds more than 6,000 artefacts and chronicles daily life in the Glencoe district between the 17th and 21st centuries, as well as displaying exhibits harking back to even earlier epochs (for example, a replica of the mysterious Bronze Age Ballachulish Goddess figure unearthed locally in 1880).

And it was here I learned of strange, unexplained lights observed on the hills around Glencoe within the last four years. Seen moving along the tops and sides of crags, it might be thought these sightings arise from torches or lanterns carried by walkers or in some cases the headlights of off-road vehicles. But inexplicably, these lights have been seen to suddenly dip down the steepest slopes and then glide out across the waters of Loch Leven towards its centre.

A clue to their origin may lie with one of the highlights of the museum collection. This is a coffin boat once used to transport bodies to the former clan burial island of Eilean Munde situated in Loch Leven. A local woman, Christina MacDonald, was the last MacDonald to be buried there in 1972 (*Scotland On Sunday*, 17 Feb 2013). It is suggested the phenomenon may represent spectral traces of torch-bearing funeral parties from afar who once descended down from the hills and then proceeded by boat to cross the water to Eilean Munde.

The helpful lady guide at the museum who shared this theory with me also drew my attention to a pamphlet *Highland Folk Lore* by Barbara Fairweather, the founder of the museum in 1963. This contains many earlier stories of strange lights, one seen so frequently it earned the name the Callart Light, after Callart House and lands on the shores of Loch Leven. A number of these appearances were deemed prophetic, heralding of the deaths of clan members, examples of the widespread Highland belief in second sight.

There are parallels here with the patterns of ghostly lights reported across the UK, with a concentration in the Highlands of Scotland, the Western Isles and often in rugged parts of England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Examples include the famed luminosities of Longdendale Valley in Derbyshire (see *Ghosts and Legends of the Peak District*, 1991, by David Clarke) which led from 1999 to the area being surveyed with a web-camera in attempts to spot them. ("Things that go bump in the net" – *D.Mail*, 26 Oct 1999). Many explanations have been postulated. Michael Greaves, a member of Glossop Paranormal Investigators, linked the lights



with the deaths of 24 navvies in a cholera epidemic at the time of the building of the Woodhead tunnel in the valley in 1838, who were buried in unconsecrated ground. He stated: "It is thought that the lights could be their unquiet souls still carrying torches to work."

This brings to mind another Scottish story of strange lights collected at Angus on the eastern side of the country. On 2 January 1950, Miss S of Letham had attended a cocktail party at a friend's house in Brechin, some 10 miles (16km) away to the north, and stayed on for dinner. It was late at night when she set out for home in her car. Conditions were treacherous after a snowfall followed by rain, and she skidded into a ditch. Abandoning her car, she set off on foot, a journey of about eight miles (13km) to Letham. Her walk was along deserted country roads, in an area with a few scattered farms. She had her little dog with her but, for the last two miles (3.2km) of the journey, she had to carry him on her shoulder.

As she neared Letham, Miss S underwent a strange experience that lasted around about 12 minutes. Approaching the crest of the road towards Dunnichen Hill, she saw moving lights coming towards her. Reaching a T-junction, she was able to make out a group of people who looked as if they were carrying flaming torches, coming closer and closer.

In extracts of a recording played at the 1977 conference of the Society for Psychical Research, she described the figures as wearing tunics and what appeared to be tights or overalls. They also had curious headgear, Miss S recalling seeing "the kind of thing a baker's boy used to wear... Just like a hard roll, round, stuck on the top of their heads... excellent

LEFT: A Pictish symbol stone in the churchyard at Aberlemno Parish Church depicting what is believed to be the Battle of Dun Nechtain (or Nechtansmere), fought in AD 685.

for carrying things on top of the head with." At this point, her dog started growling and she also saw inert bodies lying on the ground. Her impression was that the torch bearers "were obviously looking for their own dead... the one nearest the roadside, would bend down and turn a body over and, if he didn't like the look of it, he just turned it back on its face and went on to the next one... I supposed they were going to bury them."

Speaking of the lights Miss S stated: "[t]hey were carrying very long torches in their left hands... [the torches were] very red". It appears that Miss S meant the shafts of the torches were red rather than the flames; this would be consistent with resinous roots of Scots firs, which in their natural state possess a distinctive reddish colour, possibly intensified by the light of naked flames. Fir roots were used in rural Scotland for firewood and lighting until the end of the 18th century.

From the details of the scene and the figures it is speculated that they represented a vision or time-slip experience of the "aftermath of the Battle of Nechtansmere in AD 685", between the Picts and Northumbrians (James McHarg, in the *SPR Journal*, vol 49. no 778, Dec 1978, pp.937-948).

What remains puzzling is the nature of such spectral experiences. Either apparitions are objective and part of the visual spectrum reflecting real light photons which impinge on the observer's retina, or else the whole scene is produced at a higher level inside the brain and is an illusion and mimicry of normal optical effects.

Phantom lights are particularly problematic in this regard. On the one hand there is evidence they can be photographed, and yet they may also convey subjective information (e.g. death warnings) or images of figures that appear visionary or hallucinatory (see *Earthlights Revelation: UFOs and Mystery Lightform Phenomena*, 1990, Paul Devereux). It has been proposed that such lights may be connected with geological stress and fault lines in rocks, but perhaps the possibility should be explored that they may also be linked with sites of battles and bloodshed on the Earth's surface and events perpetrated in the human world.

(Sources: Paper presented at the First International Conference of the SPR in London in 1977; *Scotsman*, 17 Mar 2021; Aberdeen pressandjournal.co.uk, 11 Feb 2022).

STRANGE CONTINENT | ULRICH MAGIN brings the Euro-weirdness, from a prophetic Italian ghost to Olympian weed growers

EURO-GHOST SEASON

Ask any German (or other continental citizen, I suspect) and he or she will tell you that ghosts are something that exclusively haunt Scottish castles and old English inns. The only time that the German media report on ghosts is around Hallowe'en, and then they unpack old reports and folktales rather than real experiences; 2022 was no different. The *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger* (20 Oct 2022) listed the three most haunted hotel-castles in Europe, which are supposedly Craig y Nos in Wales, Dragsholm Palais in Denmark and Castle Lockenhaus in Austria. The last was the seat of the Baroness Elisabeth Báthory, famous for allegedly torturing and killing 650 virgin girls (see FT223:38-43). The castle now has a Dracula exhibition and is home to more than 1,000 bats. No spook, though. Dragsholm Palais in Sjaelland is different – the 12th century building boasts many encounters with dead noblemen and women, a servant girl haunts the corridors and a white lady can be seen who once loved a simple worker and was walled-in by her cruel father. The newspaper adds that in the 1930s builders actually found a skeleton clothed in a white dress when they removed some masonry.

In Italy, the press recalled an earlier incident involving Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour, a former Italian prime minister. For centuries, his ghost was met with quite often in Turin, under the arcades of the Town Hall, and also in the Municipal Offices and near the entrance to the Palazzo Civico. Researchers had collected 14 sightings up to 2017. In one of the encounters, the spook had uttered a mysterious prophecy. A ghost hunting group called National Ghost Uncover said that on the evening of 4 Nov 2017, a



ABOVE: Turin's Palazzo Civico, where in 2017 a woman encountered the ghost of Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (below).

woman encountered the ghost of Cavour at the entrance to the Palazzo Civico. He addressed her in French and prophesied that: "Within a few years Italy will have a female Prime Minister and she will be from my land." He then vanished into thin air. The woman apparently also found a coin dating back to 1849 on the pavement where the spectre had been. The story was allegedly told, at the time, to the editorial staff of *La Stampa* newspaper. "The coin is authentic. We analysed it," affirmed Massimo Merendi, president of the association. Now, as it happens, Italy has its first female prime minister, Giorgia Meloni. However, she was born in Rome on 15 Jan 1977, so is not a Piedmontese like Cavour, and the prophecy is only half true. Still, it is rather astonishing. www.100torri.it/, 15 Nov 2022.

STRANGE FINDS

The body of a German mountaineer who had been missing for over 30 years was discovered towards

"Within a few years Italy will have a female prime minister"



the end of July 2022 on the Stockji glacier near Zermatt, Switzerland. The 27-year-old climber from Nürtingen, Baden-Württemberg, had undertaken a mountain tour of several days' duration in August 1990, intending to walk from Chamonix in France to Domodossola in Italy. As Swiss police told reporters, the find was made because of retreating glaciers. Human remains are discovered quite often in the wake of the thaw. *Rheinpfalz*, 31 Aug 2022.

What was believed to be the most northerly island in the world, Qeqertaq Avannarleq, lying to the north of Greenland and measuring only 30 by 60 metres (100 by 200ft), has proved on closer investigation to be not an island at all, but just a gravel-covered iceberg. The "island", discovered in 2021, was investigated by Danish researcher Rene Forsberg, who visited all new islands mapped near Greenland since 1978 and found that each had changed its position. Qeqertaq Avannarleq was found 800m (2,625ft)



ABOVE LEFT: Teo Lucas and the giant squid he recovered off Tenerife. ABOVE RIGHT: The brown bear that strolled into the centre of Ponferrada in north-western Spain.

north of Oodaaq, discovered in 1978 off the North Cape of Greenland (and which had also moved). Geographers now believe that Inuit Qeqertaat (at 83°39' 55" N, 30° 37' 45" W) is the world's most northerly island. *Rheinpfalz*, 12 Sept 2022.

A different kind of discovery was made by Susanne Schmid, a hairdresser from Lucerne, Switzerland. She stuffed cut hair into a pair of tights, with strands of hair hanging down from it, and let it float on Lake Lucerne. Tests have shown the strange contraption collects and binds oil that pollutes the water. "I thought we could use our hair for other purposes than just adding it to the compost," said Schmid. She had come across the idea on the Internet when she read about a French hairdresser who was using hair to bind oil. Schmid started to experiment with hair, which she collected with a vacuum cleaner and then stored in bags. "We have already amassed some 20kg [44lb] of hair since the beginning of the year," she said Schmid. One kilo of hair can accumulate up to 8kg (18lb) of oil, and, even better, the tights can be cleaned and reused. *www.luzernerzeitung.ch*, 10 Oct 2022.

'RATTLEMAN' PANIC

In Bonn, Germany, a man nicknamed "the rattleman" has been seen in fields at Meßdorf, and has caused a growing panic among the

local population. The man walks along a certain road, rhythmically shakes his rattles and murmurs strange things to himself. Some witnesses speculated that he was scaring away birds, but I suspect he is acting as some kind of shaman or healer. Police received several complaints in the course of a few weeks and visited the site, but found that nothing criminal had occurred, as a spokesman explained. The man had indeed behaved strangely, but had not threatened anyone. Police could only take action in the event that he posed a threat to onlookers, something he obviously does not do, although he had once jumped in front of a car and caused the driver to brake. In this particular incident, he had been taken to the police station and interrogated. Parents, though, are worried about their children encountering the mysterious man on their way to school. Police have suggested establishing a network of safe places the children can escape to should the 'rattleman' come too close. *Rhein-Sieg-Anzeiger*, 16 Sept 2022.

SQUID DISCOVERY

Sometime in late summer, people alerted Teo Lucas, a hobby marine biologist, of a giant squid that was drifting in the waters off Tenerife in the Canary Islands, Spain. He quickly went there and retrieved the dead creature,

which is special because it is almost perfectly preserved, including its eyes, which were as large as a human fist. Its body, including the eight short tentacles, measured 3m (10ft) and weighed 100kg (220lb). The carcass was shipped to the Spanish Institute for Oceanography. *www.teneriffa-news.com*, 11 Oct 2022.

OOP ANIMALS

A cab driver and other locals informed police on 11 Oct 2022 that a bear was strolling through the centre of Ponferrada, in north-western Spain. Several patrols went looking for the animal, which was walking close to the River Sil, and led it back to its reservation on Mount Pajariel. Bears are not uncommon in Spain, but seldom visit larger urban areas such as Ponferrada, which has 65,000 inhabitants. *Rheinpfalz*, 12 Oct 2022.

Customs officers at Düsseldorf airport in Germany were surprised when they noticed what they thought was a 20cm (8in) toy snail – and then it moved. They followed its slimy train back to the parcel from Nigeria where a second snail poked its head through a hole. The parcel was addressed to an Afro Shop in the Ruhr Region. The snails

were not of a protected species and are treasured as a delicacy by Nigerians. *Rheinpfalz*, 17 Sept 2022.

SEX AND DRUGS AND ANCIENT GODS

Israeli archaeologists have uncovered 3,500-year-old traces of opium at a gravesite in Tel Jehud near Tel Aviv. As a press release by the Weizmann Institute and the Israeli

Antiquity Department says, the find underlines the importance of the opium trade in the cultures of the ancient Middle East. The opium was contained in vessels shaped like upside-down poppy heads (left) and its location near a grave site suggests it was either a gift to the deceased or else taken by mourners hoping to meet their dead relatives in drug-induced visions. *Rheinpfalz*, 21 Sept 2022.

Do the Gods still need drugs? Greek police found a cannabis plantation on the slopes of Mount Olympus, Greece, the seat of the Greek gods in antiquity. As the Greek radio station ERT reported on 15 September 2022, more than 400 plants were discovered and two farmers arrested. Police agents valued the cannabis at a market price of between 12 and 20 million Euros. *Rheinpfalz*, 17 Sept 2022.



THE CONSPIRASPHERE

What might 2023 bring in the way of revelations from the Conspirasphere? **NOEL ROONEY** does his best impression of Nostradamus and looks at the top 10 online predictions...

THINGS TO COME?

Prediction is a slippery business at best; unless you're Baba Vanga, you're unlikely to get a government pension for it. But this time of year seems to bring out the Nostradamus in even the most sober of commentators. The Conspirasphere is generally shy of predictions, but I found one list that was posted on a number of sites, originally put out there by Ben Sellers, the editor of a patriotic news platform called *Headline USA*.

Sellers offers 10 predictions, which I'll list briefly here: Jan 6 will be revealed as a psy-op; the deadly impact of Covid vaccines will become apparent; the scope of China's control over the US Government will become clear; the true nature of David de Pape's relationship with Paul Pelosi will become clear; we will find out the contents of Trump's Mar-a-Lago files; we will learn what the Democrats have planned for Joe Biden and who will replace him; we will discover the truth about the US/Ukraine bio-weapons programme; the Left's plan to mainstream paedophilia will come to fruition; the WEF will turn us all into AI trans-humans; and we will learn how big tech and the deep state are tracking us through all our devices.

Two things strike me about this list: first, many of the items on it are only borderline conspiracy theory, if they qualify at all; and secondly, prediction in the C-sphere is an exercise in retrospection as much as prophecy. The first tells us something about the increasingly permeable borders between margin and mainstream in relation to conspiracy theories. The second may tell us something about the nature of conspiracy theory as a worldview.

Let's look at a couple of items on the list in a little more detail. How you view the Jan 6 affair – an organised



The victim is what used to be referred to as the objective truth

attempt at armed insurrection; a fiasco caused by weak policing and an addled form of extreme tourism; or a false flag orchestrated by Nancy Pelosi – likely says something about your political leanings. It's probably fair to say that none of these points of view fits the facts, and anomalies, of that strange day comprehensively. This is one of those stories where commentators have garnered details from a range of sources that vary in quality and veracity. A self-proclaimed shaman in a peculiar hat taking selfies in the Capitol is an apt icon for the bizarre event; but people died that day, and their deaths have, sadly, been used by folk on all sides to drive the story their way.

The impact of Covid vaccines is a conspiracy to some, and a matter of scientific debate to others. Sorting the genuine concerns from the wacky speculation is not easy; the conspiracists have contaminated the scientific dissent with the insertion of shibboleths such as 'satanic' and 'depopulation' into otherwise sincere arguments (I'm not saying fears of Satanism are de facto insincere, but you see

what I'm getting at). And there are commentators in the mainstream who are using this contamination to dismiss all dissent as conspiracy theory. A story that could do with some clarity is unlikely to find any, at least not while so many are invested in muddying the waters.

Perhaps that's true of all the items on Sellers' little list. The political schism in the US seems to turn the most sober of observers into partisan commentators; the less sober (and yes, that includes many in the C-sphere; but I would suggest they are not entirely alone) make hay with uncertainty and transform a raggedly reported story into a fantasy farrago. The victim in this disorganising process is what used (seriously) to be referred to as the objective truth. It's as if the belligerents in this contest for perceived truth have unconsciously joined forces in a war on reality.

None of the items on the list is new. Some stories have been running for a year or more; some for much longer. This, it seems to me, is a feature that demands attention. Some years ago, I suggested that conspiracy theory could be divided into hermeneutic – or grand narrative – conspiracy theory and automatic dissent (knee-jerk reaction, if you like). Now I find myself wondering if all conspiracy theory eventually feeds back into the grand narrative, like a kind of

LEFT: Were events at the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 a psy-op?

canonical recycling initiative, despite the fact that some content creators are blissfully unaware of the strange tradition to which they belong.

In recent months, I've noticed a kind of historical retrenchment in the Conspirasphere. A good number of writers have begun to use the term 'Luciferian' to characterise the villains in the ongoing drama; and this term has history. It was first used in conspiracy theory in the work of Guy William Carr, principally in a book called *Pawns in the Game*. The book was published in the late 1950s and sold an extraordinary half a million copies. I wonder if we are seeing evidence of a periodic return to canonical sources, which in turn drives renewed gathering of grist for the conspiracist mill.

Finally, I recently had one of those moments of discovery that adds a whole new vein of strangeness to events already strange. During the siege of the Branch Davidian compound at Waco, Texas, in 1993, four officers of the ATF died, along with an estimated 75 members of the religious movement (**FT133:34-38**). All four (or three of the four in a few versions) were apparently former bodyguards for Bill Clinton, according to a number of sources. The Clinton Body Count is already one of the more exotic theories of recent years, but this new level of attenuation is tantamount to magical. The possible permutations could keep a tin foil hat warm for years.

<https://headlineusa.com/sellers-10-conspiracy-theories-validate-2023/>;
<https://historyheist.com/four-former-clinton-bodyguards-are-sacrificially-killed-to-justify-a-large-scale-retaliation-of-the-branch-davidians-in-waco/>

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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Trouble in paradise for the Brazilian rag doll family and the end of the line for Somerset's creepy gimp

SAMANTHA AZZOPARDI

[FT408:20]



Serial orphan impersonator and fantasist Samantha Azzopardi was back in the news in August. Having racked up an impressive array of charges around the world under the names of Emily Peet, Lindsay Coughlin, Dakota Johnson, Georgia McAuliffe, Harper Hernandez, Harper Hart and many others while pretending to be, variously, a kidnapped Swedish royal, a nanny, a Russian gymnast who was the sole survivor of a murder-suicide incident in France, and a variety of other lost early teen girls, she landed in court for the 100th time in her native Australia.

Despite now being 33, the slight and waif-like Azzopardi had approached the care charity JewishCare with the story that she was a 14-year-old who had recently arrived in Australia to stay with a foster family after fleeing abuse in her native France, leading police to suspect she was a victim of child sex trafficking. This led to extensive investigations by New South Wales police and several other agencies, as well as French police, who attempted to track down the foster family and investigate the abuse claims. Following nine hours of interrogation during which Azzopardi claimed to only speak French, authorities realised who she really was and charged her with knowingly making a false representation to police that she was a victim of child neglect. In court she was described as “a compulsive liar who suffers a number of mental health illnesses which impacted on her offending” and sentenced to 17 months in custody, although she was released on appeal after three months, with the appeal court describing her initial sentence as “somewhat harsh”. *Saturday Telegraph (Sydney)*, 27 Aug; *dailymail.co.uk*, 5 Dec 2022.



ABOVE: Meirivone Rocha Moraes, cheating husband Marcello and the couple's son appeared on a Brazilian TV show.

SOMERSET GIMP MAN

[FT384:24, 391:18, 412:9]



The Somerset Gimp Man's reign of terror seems to have come to an end in October.

Chefs Alex Warren, 19, and Charlie Bond, 20, were approached by a man in a gimp suit in Cleve, North Somerset, close to the villages of Claverham and Yatton, where previous encounters had taken place. Warren said that as he approached them, the man “took a step up on the pavement, arched his body and flopped to the ground, without putting his hands out to catch himself” then started writhing about while “speaking some demon language”. He was wearing blue latex gloves and a dark bodysuit from head to toe, which was covered in mud. “His outfit was shiny with some sort of liquid and he was glistening in the torchlight and he smelt really earthy,” Warren said. “He was quite pungent.” Initially frightened by the gimp,

the men realised the absurdity of the situation, began to laugh, and started filming him. Realising he was not having the effect he intended, the rubber-clad man got sheepishly to his feet and accepted a cigarette from the pair, who can be heard saying “Get home safe, alright?” to which the gimp replies, “I’ll try.” After the men alerted police, they sent out a helicopter and a dog unit resulting in the arrest of a man in his 30s on suspicion of causing a public nuisance. As to whether the man had been responsible for other sightings, Avon and Somerset Police said it was “keeping an open mind about the intentions of the man and whether the incident is linked to any others.” Meanwhile, it seems the Somerset Gimp's activities have not gone down well in the wider gimp community. “The Gimp Man of Essex”, a Colchester-based social media personality, has gone public with his views on his Somerset counterpart. The Essex gimp is well-known in his local area

and can often be seen doing his weekly shop in Tesco, clad head-to-toe in black latex, as well as hosting charity events in his fetish gear. “This guy has undone everything the gimp community is trying to do. It gives us all a bad rep,” he says. “Jumping out on women, however you’re dressed, isn’t right. There are innocent guys like me who go out on walks in their gimp suits... I wouldn’t be surprised if alcohol or drugs were involved. They are asking for trouble terrorising people like that late at night.” *BBC News*, 28 Oct; *telegraph.co.uk*, 29 Oct; *essexlive.news*, 19 Nov 2022.

RAG DOLL MARRIAGE

[FT423:8-9]



After marrying a life-sized male rag doll named Marcello last year and having a “baby” with him, Meirivone Rocha Moraes, 37, from Brazil now claims their relationship is “hanging by a thread” after she found her husband “cheating” on her. “I

found out through a friend who told me that she saw Marcelo entering a motel with another woman while I was hospitalised for three nights and three days with Marcelinho, our son, who had a virus,” said Moraes. “At first, I thought she was lying, but then I started looking through his phone and I saw the conversations, which made me sure he was cheating.” When she confronted Marcello, he “kept denying everything and said he loves me very much, as well as asking for forgiveness and crying a lot,” she said, adding that she and her husband are now sleeping in separate beds. She also says she started to have doubts about their relationship because she is the only breadwinner, and they were struggling to pay the bills. Moraes shared news of her betrayal on TikTok, where it got 1.6 million views and over 120,000 likes for her revelations. She has, however, decided to stay with Marcello for the time being, saying, “I wanted to put him out of the house but our baby is growing up and at this stage, he would miss his father a lot.” *dailymail.co.uk*, 18 Nov 2022.

CARKING OLIGARCHS [FT421:8-9, 424:22-23]

Since the last update on suspicious deaths among influential Russians, they continue to die strangely in increasing numbers. Pavel Pchel'nikov (below), a senior manager with the Russian Railways subsidiary Digital Logistics, unexpectedly committed suicide by jumping from his balcony in late September, while a few days earlier aviation expert and former Putin ally Anatoly Gerashchenko, 73, died after an unexplained fall “from a great height” that led to him crashing down multiple flights of stairs at the Moscow Aviation Institute. In late October, it was the turn of pro-Putin journalist Svetlana Babayeva, 50, who died when

she was “hit by her own bullet” as a result of “a freak ricochet” at a “military sports shooting” event in Simferopol in occupied Crimea. As well as being head of the Rossiya Segodnya media group’s bureau in Simferopol, Babayeva was reported to be an instructor at the secretive Volk International Training Centre, which provided tactical training services for armed groups and bodyguards. Vladimir Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov called her death an “irreparable loss” adding, “She was a multi-talented journalist and just a charming woman.” In November, shortly after Colonel Vadim Boyko, 44, arrived at work at the Makarov Pacific Higher Naval School in Vladivostok, shots were heard from his office and colleagues found him dead on the floor with five bullet wounds to his chest. Russian authorities said that Boyko, who had been closely involved in mobilising Russian troops for the Ukraine invasion, had committed suicide, but no note was found, and even official media queried whether it was possible for him to have shot himself five times. This came less than a month after Lt-Col Roman Malyk, 49, was found dead on a fence in the nearby Primorsky region. Malyk had also been involved in the mobilisation and was announced as having committed suicide after a brief murder investigation, but his family said he was “balanced and self-confident” and would not have killed himself. *vox.com*, 14 Oct; *mirror.co.uk*, 29 Oct; *dailymail.co.uk*, 16 Nov 2022.



MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

265: OF BOGS 'N' BUMS



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Toilet seats: yuck!

The “truth”

I recently spent a weekend choosing, buying and installing a new loo seat (here in the jet set, life is basically one long thrill). Among its selling points was that it had undergone an undefined “anti-bacterial treatment” that would prevent any build-up of “germs and bacteria”. This alarmed me rather than reassuring me because I’d had no idea that such a build-up was a possibility. What if I stumbled in there one night, forgot to put the light on, and the bastards overpowered me? But relax – it turns out the anti-bacterial treatment is a solution to a non-existent problem. Endless research has been done during the last 20 years into the comparative germiness of various home surfaces, all of which have found the loo seat to be both relatively and absolutely innocuous. Indeed, the phrase “more germs than your toilet seat” has become a familiar metric, applied to (an incomplete list) smartphones, keyboards, remote controls, chopping boards, washing-up cloths or sponges, tea towels, fridges, supermarket trolleys, desks, carpets, children’s car seats and handbags. In fact, one famous study in 2012 concluded that “there are not many things cleaner than a toilet seat when it comes to germs.” Besides which, catching a disease via your bum cheeks is quite difficult. Intestinal diseases generally come from hand-to-mouth faecal contamination. Recent claims that covering the seat with loo roll is counter-productive, because paper is more hospitable to germs than wood or plastic, are widely disputed. The fundamental point however is clear: sitting on a public toilet seat isn’t dangerous, it’s just horrid.

Sources

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NECROLOG

This month, we celebrate the long career of a British ufologist whose championing of novel ideas helped open the subject up to new 'psycho-social' perspectives



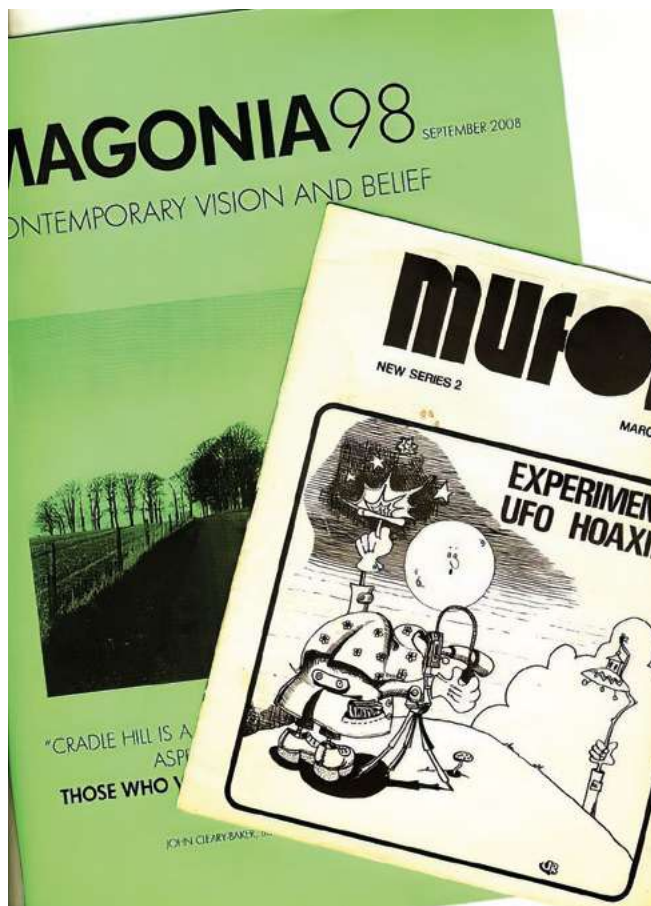
JOHN HARNEY

John Harney was one of the last of the early generation of British ufologists whose interests were excited as teenagers by the American UFO waves of the early 1950s and books such as Morris Jessup's *The Case for the UFO*; Waveney Girvan's *Flying Saucers and Common Sense*, and of course *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, by George Adamski and Desmond Leslie, as well as developments in rocket science and speculation about space exploration.

John was born in Bromborough and attended St Anselm's College in Birkenhead. On leaving school he worked briefly as a bus conductor while waiting to be called up for National Service with the RAF, where he was directed to the Meteorological Section at a number of RAF stations.

On one occasion while serving in the RAF at Biggin Hill, he attended a meeting of the Tunbridge Wells UFO Club at the home of Lord Dowding, who led Fighter Command in the Battle of Britain and was a strong advocate of exotic explanations for UFOs. He recalls that the presence of a uniformed aircraftman in such august company took Lord Dowding by surprise!

After leaving the RAF he continued working with the Met Office, and served three tours of duty on Ocean Weather



ABOVE: From MUFOB to Magonia – some of John Harney's seminal contributions.

ships, where he developed an enthusiasm for swimming in the mid-Atlantic! Returning to Merseyside, he worked at the Liverpool Port Meteorological Office, collating weather data from ships arriving at the Liverpool docks.

While back home, he joined the newly-founded Merseyside UFO Research Group, first as secretary and then, in 1966, taking over the editorship of the group's bi-monthly bulletin; this he produced on a flat-bed duplicator, laboriously inking each page individually through a typed wax stencil, until a more efficient rotary duplicator was donated to the group.

Along with a number of like-minded members, including science teacher and geologist

Alan Sharp, he began to take the *Bulletin* in a direction away from extraterrestrial explanations towards a broader and more sceptical perspective on the phenomenon. Inevitably this produced a backlash, not only within the Group, but from the wider, very conservative British UFO 'Establishment', then centred on BUFORA, the British UFO Research Association. This was dominated by individuals who often had a strongly mystical view of UFOs, seeing them as a weapon against secular modernity, for example dismissing the scientifically oriented Cambridge University students' UFO group as "those white-coated godlings of the laboratory".

These disagreements

inevitably led to John, along with Alan Sharp, breaking away from the local group and establishing the *Merseyside UFO Bulletin* (MUFOB) as an independent publication. MUFOB rapidly gained a reputation as a voice for the evolving 'New Ufology'. Originating in the USA with ufological writers such as John Keel and Jacques Vallee, this began to extend UFO study into fields such as folklore, psychical phenomena and psychological theories, as well as a greater examination of the historic backgrounds to the phenomenon – particularly the 19th and early 20th century airship reports.

Under John's editorship MUFOB gained a reputation as an often acerbic critic of what its editors and contributors saw as unscientific and sensationalist approaches to the subject, and became a leading proponent of a 'psycho-social' perspective on the UFO mystery. Although MUFOB never had a print circulation of more than a couple of hundred, it had a much wider influence on the subject, presenting not only new ideas, but also acting as a 'test-bed' for a number of ufologists and writers who went on to make their own contributions to the subject. In a tribute when the magazine moved from a printed to a digital format, *Fortean Times* founder Bob Rickard described it as "FT's older brother".

John was never a member of the UFO 'conference circuit', although he did speak at a few such events, his contribution to the subject being largely through articles and editorials in the *Bulletin*, and providing a forum for a wide range of opinion.

There was a break in the publication of MUFOB in 1973-4. In 1974, John was transferred from the Liverpool Met Office to the station at

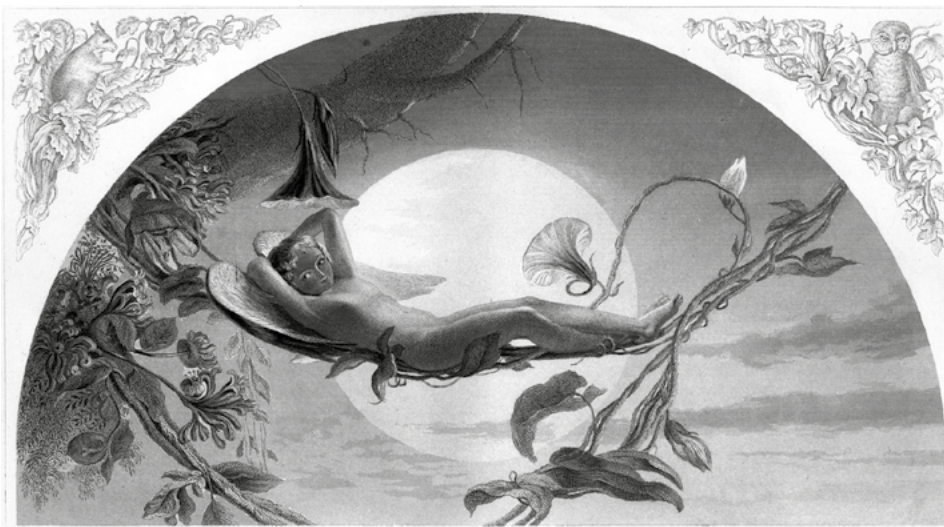


Kew Observatory in London, and publication restarted simply under the established acronym *MUFOB* (the 'Merseyside' description now being redundant). John took a step back from the editorship, transferring it to John Rimmer, although still remaining totally involved with the publication. In 1979 the magazine was renamed *Magonia*.

A further transfer to the Met Office HQ in Bracknell involved him in the operation of new computer systems that were being developed at the time and working on the *Marine Observer*, a quarterly journal that published meteorological reports from ships around the world, many of which described phenomena that had very fortetean characteristics. At the same time, he took an Open University course, gaining an honours degree in philosophy, which informed many of his later contributions to the magazine. He remained an active partner in the publication of *Magonia*, making regular contributions until his health began to deteriorate in 2019, and he later moved from Bracknell back to the family home in the Wirral.

Although he maintained that a healthy tolerance for the absurd and a keen bullshit detector were essential for anyone straying into the field of ufology, his approach was always open-minded and serious. In an early issue of the *Merseyside Bulletin* he wrote: "Our attitude is rational, we do not believe anything about UFOs, except that the persistent reports and the more sober speculation concerning them is worthy of serious attention from the scientific community, and that any reasonably intelligent person with an open and enquiring mind, can derive much interest and pleasure from studying the subject."

John Harney, meteorologist and ufologist, born Bromborough, Wirral, 15 July 1937; died Bromborough, 8 Sept 2022, aged 85.
John Rimmer



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

THE ROMANS IN BRITAIN

Is the ghostworld an equal opportunity employer? I don't refer here to race or gender, but to the much more curious and, I suspect for ghosts, more serious inequality between epochs. As a very, very general rule ghosts seem to get rarer the further we go back in time. There are, in Britain, more Victorian than Tudor ghosts, more Tudor ghosts than Roman ghosts and dismally few Neolithic or Palaeolithic ghosts. There have been some attempts by forteans to explain this fading effect with theories about ghosts 'wearing out'. We don't have many 'caveman' ghosts – Rogh, the spirit in the BBC's *Ghosts*, is an honourable exception – because they have already spent their ghostly energy through the centuries.

Alternatively, ghosts are associated predominantly with buildings, and as buildings disappear then so do the associated phantoms. This is all good as far as it goes, but it ignores the peculiar epoch spikes we have in the history of ghost sightings. An excellent example of this is the arrival of Roman ghosts in the modern period. There are, to the best of my knowledge (and I've looked), no ghosts from Britain identified as 'Roman' before the 19th century. Roman ghosts start to appear very intermittently in fiction and ghost reports in the 1800s. They then became numerous in the 20th century (particularly after World War II): marching

Roman legionaries were especially common. Why? The obvious answer belongs to those who do not much care for the existence of ghosts. Romans had started in the 1800s to become part of popular culture and by the 1900s, and particularly in the great post-war sword-and-sandal films, they were easily imagined.

THERE ARE
NO GHOSTS
FROM BRITAIN
IDENTIFIED
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CENTURY

A subtler possibility (pointed out to me by Chris Woodyard) is that Roman ghosts were always there, but that people didn't recognise them as Romans. They were just drilling soldier ghosts or eccentric spirits in exotic clothes. After all, how could an Elizabethan farmer (or, come to that, an Elizabethan intellectual) have been expected to recognise Roman dress? I suspect that neither of these explanations is the key: though as I have no better solution, I will leave off complaining. However, it is

worth noting that Roman sites in Britain were frequently associated with fairies. Indeed, Roman coins were sometimes called 'fairy' coins. It is worth noting, too, that fairies were frequently seen in groups and that these groups were often observed drilling in military formation. Perhaps the spirits of Romans past have long been with us; it is just that we called them 'fairies' rather than 'Romans'. Or is it that modern marching Roman ghosts are actually fairies in one of their new guises?

Simon is co-presenter of the *Boggart and Banshee* podcast.



Nude aliens and morphing squirrels

NIGEL WATSON asks why 'real' ETs would present themselves in such daft and outlandish ways

NAKED STETSON GUY

ETs come in all shapes and sizes. As a specific example, the alien visitors detailed in CDB Bryan's book *Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind* (1996), as described by witnesses called 'Carol' and 'Alice', are a reality-bending bunch of characters. One such encounter occurred on a night when Carol was sitting in her broken down car and she noticed that the same vehicle kept passing by until it finally parked behind her. To her surprise, she saw a 6ft (1.8m) tall "person" emerge from the car wearing a 4ft (1.2m) wide Stetson hat (p.292). The detail of that unlikely fashion accessory alone stretches most notions of credibility.

To discover more about the circumstances of this incident, Carol undertook self-hypnosis, during which she recalled that the man wearing the cowboy hat was also totally naked. When he inspected the engine of her car with a light, she noticed he did not have a belly button and his body was shiny white.

This was bizarre enough, but Carol went on to say that he wore wraparound sunglasses, and had a moustache with a knob at each end hanging under his small nose. She said: "This fellow had a head the size of three basketballs put together inside a hat that fit him!" (p.296). Telepathically, he told her to use a telephone in a nearby house to phone for help. On going to the house, she saw a small glowing being, about 4ft (1.2m) tall, who pointed at her and caused her to forget the preceding events. But why did 'they' not succeed in completely obliterating her memories? As in many other cases, it seems aliens are pretty shoddy at forcing us to forget about their nefarious activities.

The encounter sounds straight out of one of John Keel's incredible stories about confused, robotic, shade-wearing Men in Black. When questioned, Carol could not decide whether she imagined the whole thing or if she really was abducted or escorted into a flying saucer (p.298).

On another occasion, she was floated inside a UFO by three small Greys, and was inspected by a tall 'Doctor' being assisted by two other tall grey Technicians (pp.409-410).

During a 'flashback' experience she saw beings with chocolate-charcoal brown, jointless hands like those of a huge tree frog (p.287). When abductionist Budd Hopkins hypnotised Carol and regressed her to childhood, she saw big cats and a bright light. Afterwards, she wondered why she did not hate cats, to which Alice and Budd both say: "Because they weren't cats!" (p.450).



LEFT: An example of Cold War-era US advertising featuring UFOs.

Indeed, Hopkins 'helped' them accept all their experiences as being of an alien nature.

Carol and Alice later revealed their real names, Beth Collings and Anna Jamerson, when they later published *Connections: Solving Our Alien Abduction Mystery* (1996). They both wrestled with questions of what is real and what isn't and noted down everything odd that happened to them: the problem is that all of it is thrown into the 'alien abduction' pot. A turkey, for instance, seen before the Stetson-wearing shiny man appeared, is regarded as a screen memory; and a memory of childhood rape is another screen memory. They also recount stories of shared dreams, unexplained scars, phantom pregnancies, missing time, electrical disturbances, malfunctions and even eyesight problems – all attributed to 'them'.

MORPHING AND MOTORING

Nudge Squidfish (!) in a Facebook post on the MUFON Ohio page (19 Nov 2022) confirms that grey ETs "take on a wide variety of shapes and false appearances". Once, he said, "I did catch a Grey shortly after it morphed into a squirrel. All around the squirrel was a purplish glow. The squirrel used telepathy to speak with me after morphing. It was a stressful learning experience. To this day, I still have my doubts about this experience."

He has also seen ETs morphing into police and military helicopters, US post office letterboxes and lamp posts. "On

another occasion," he says, "I once ran into a totally human looking ET at my doctor's office. This ET worked for one of the big drug companies and was giving out free samples of new products." Nudge knew it was an ET because he can distinguish between the psychic aura of a human and that of an alien.

He adds that humanoid ETs drive around in cars with blacked-out windows and coloured headlights. Their vehicles look normal on the outside, but if you get the chance to look inside them you will see a vast array of colourful instruments and unusual controls. He thinks there could be as many as 1,000 of these ET vehicles embedded in Central Ohio, and they are likely travellers from our future.

MIND BENDING

In the early days of ufology, the aliens that emerged from UFOs often looked like astronauts dressed in spacesuits and seemed to be making scientific observations.

However, since then, aliens often do not conform to our idea of 'real' biological entities or robotic machines. They are more like shape-shifting ghosts who leave no evidence behind them. This has led to speculation that they are 'projections' from real ET spacecraft or planets, or are caused by ETs who can move through time and/or the electromagnetic spectrum. Yet, why would they present themselves wearing stupid Stetson hats, or as three-toed tree frogs or cats? Why would they reveal themselves morphing into squirrels? They are literally like the stuff of dreams, giving shape to our unconscious expectations and concerns – but it could be that's exactly what 'they' want us to believe!

ALIEN ADS

The pervasive nature of alien imagery is underlined in a new study by Matt McAllister, professor of film production and media studies, and Greg Eghigian, professor of history, at Penn State University. "Flying Saucers and UFOs in US Advertising During the Cold War, 1947–1989" takes a 'fun' look at 150 Cold War-era advertisements that feature flying saucers and aliens. They note six major themes in these adverts that play on concepts of the future, progress, technology and modernity, in the service of commerce. muse.jhu.edu/article/868219



Parallels, Part Two

JENNY RANGLES suggest time-travelling ghosts and ufonauts might be visitors from parallel realities

Last issue I suggested an explanation for UFOs that does not require ufonauts to come from an alien world or to be time travellers from our future.

If real entities are being seen in some close encounter cases, then a third possibility exists, which has gained little attention up to now: visitors from a parallel universe alongside our own. The theory goes that potentially millions of such universes exist, and they occasionally intersect with ours. This is something modern physics finds increasingly plausible.

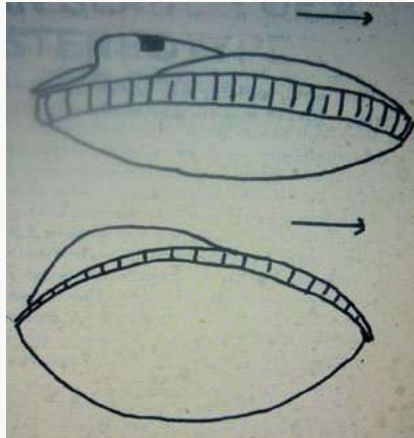
Pat Phoenix, who played Elsie Tanner in *Coronation Street*, had an intriguing story to tell me. She – and several others who visited her home in Sale – saw a woman walk through the house, but she appeared only as long as you stared at her. If you blinked, then she disappeared. Those accounts were consistent. The woman was carrying something in her hand, wore old-fashioned dress and had her hair in a bun. Moreover the air in the room went cold as she passed – as if energy was being sucked out and transformed in order to facilitate this cross-temporal rerun.

I was told that in Victorian times an actress had once lived in the house, and Pat thought this might be what was being seen – past and present briefly coexisting. Some may term that a ghost. Or, more interesting to me – was it a kind of parallax effect of time and space intersecting?

Another witness called Mary, from North Wales, contacted me wanting to understand strange events in her house. She described feeling “like a sponge” every now and then, as if she was soaking up emotional energy. These physical effects seemed a clue. Mary noted that as it drained out of her it transferred into the vision of a man walking through her room. That man had seemingly been a servant when the house was owned by a large family. So a ‘ghost’ by the usual definition. Yet I was more intrigued because – as with Pat Phoenix – a visual rerun of an everyday event came via a perception of energy draining.

These ‘time slip’ visions seemed less like ghost stories the more I heard – more akin to parallel realities that in rare instances shifted from one realm to the other. That hint about losing a ‘lock’ on the figure if you blinked was important. There had to be a connecting thread between past and future that was in some way linked to the consciousness of the witness.

Auditory timeslips are also common.



When my fiancé Paul and I first got together he was a jeweller at a workshop in Chester. Several workers there swore that from time to time an unseen person walked through the workshop – his or her footsteps echoing on the stone. They could follow the steps’ passage and tell when they briefly stopped, then moved on. Investigation revealed that in the 1700s this building had contained a cell where condemned prisoners were held before execution, pacing up and down.

This all suggests that time is not simple and energy in some way can record visual and auditory experiences that persist. However, if this works going back in time, what of a vision of a future reality? Two times are involved in all of these experiences: then and now. The person seeing the apparition is in the future of the person living the past. If they saw you as you see them, they would be experiencing an apparent contact with the future.

Could UFO encounters involve the other side of such a rift?

The concept of time travellers from the future seems logical in UFO cases. But if time and space consist of slightly different adjacent parallel versions where small changes cascade over time, then we might be mistaking a parallel version of humanity for an alien one.

So – I wonder – if time flows both ways, are we, when we see ufonauts, like that Victorian lady, experiencing someone in *our* future? How would we view beings of the 22nd century with whom this bridge is opened and then closed? Would we assume human-like aliens from another planet are here?

But is there evidence that links these experiences directly to UFOs? Perhaps. A

LEFT: Witness sketches of the object seen at Rogue River, Oregon, on 24 May 1949.

man contacted me to describe a sighting he had had over two decades before, at school in Luton, in May 1957. It was clearly something real: pupils and a teacher watched it happen. This was on a mild summer’s day at 1.20 in the afternoon. The object was a classic disc, but with slow movement and dramatic changes of direction, and it did not move with the winds. It came very close at low altitude and was seen in great detail.

The details include tiny things, like the effect on the watchers’ eyes of a grille rim around the object and a reddish glow as it moved through cloud. The object’s disappearance was equally odd. It stood on end, pointing vertically upward, and vanished when the witness looked away for a second. Others agreed that it did not fly away – *it literally vanished*. You would expect most of Luton saw this, but no other reports exist. Yet what seems a mirror of this case, thousands of miles away, had happened years earlier. This was not on record when the witness reported his experience to me.

That case was at Rogue River, Oregon, USA, on 24 May 1949. There were five witnesses – three men and two women on a boat, fishing. They saw an object with identical features. Two of them used naval binoculars to observe. It was even seen standing on edge discharging light at the start of the event, before going into level flight – a reverse of the disappearance in Luton, and uncommon in UFO reports. The ridges, fin, and square mark on the back edge were features of both sightings.

It is very unusual for a distinctive type of craft to be independently well-described in separate incidents – implying something real. Only its origin is in question. Perhaps this was a real future craft that by some multiverse overlap was seen in two different places.

There is another possibility that needs to be noted here. The Rogue River case was considered by some USAF analysts as possibly a kind of kite used at that time to increase radar coverage. That would seem to require some misperception in both cases. However caution suggests it be the default for now. Either way I am on the lookout for further signs that parallel realities may exist.

THE CHICAGO MOTHMAN

PART ONE

RED-EYED CREATURES & GREEN-EYED MONSTERS



In 2011, reports started to come in from the American Midwest about a weird winged entity that resembled the West Virginia Mothman famously documented by John Keel in the 1960s and 1970s. Had the creature made a new home in Chicago? Was a serial hoaxer at work?

TEA KRULOS interviewed the researchers involved in the subsequent investigation and uncovered a story of terrified witnesses and bitter rivalries.

“Suddenly a figure stirred in the darkness behind the parked car...It rose up slowly from the ground. A big gray thing. Bigger than a man, with terrible glowing red eyes.” – John Keel, *The Mothman Prophecies*

“O, beware, my lord of jealousy; it is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on.” – William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

Twelve years ago, Mothman, the red-eyed flying monster who had first terrorised the small town of Point Pleasant, West Virginia, in 1966 and 1967 (see FT156:26-54), made a comeback. Unlike his first appearances, this wave of sightings happened in one of the largest metropolises in America: Chicago.

Here’s how the original Mothman story goes. On 15 November 1966, two young couples – Linda and Roger Scarberry and Steve and Mary Mallette – were joyriding in a black ‘57 Chevy on the outskirts of Point Pleasant. They were cruising in an abandoned property called the ‘TNT area’. During World War II there was a munitions factory and a power plant here, with almost 100 concrete igloo-shaped buildings where explosives were stored. By 1966, it was empty and had become a popular destination for the youth of Point Pleasant, who drank, drag raced and made sweet love in their cars under the moonlight.

On this particular night, though, these young people would have an experience that



LEFT: The initial Mothman report in the *Point Pleasant Register*, 16 Nov 1966 and a 1975 story with Roger Scarberry’s witness sketch.

would forever change their lives and the identity of Point Pleasant. The Chevy’s headlights fell across a winged being that stared at them with glowing red eyes. The frightened couples peeled out of the TNT area, sped into town and eventually made their way to the police station.

A headline the next day in the *Point Pleasant Register* read “Couples See Man-sized Bird... Creature... Something”, but soon a snappy newspaper copywriter came up with a name for the unknown entity, inspired by the popular 1966 *Batman* TV show: Mothman, a new terror of the night.

Many reports of this creature followed over the next year. Mothman was spotted in people’s yards and flying over the city, dive-bombing cars, and possibly stealing dogs. Point Pleasant also experienced UFO sightings and encounters with the Men in Black – those strange but sharply dressed men who questioned people about their sightings and warned them to keep quiet about them. The story culminated in a disaster: the collapse of Point Pleasant’s Silver Bridge on 15 December 1967. The bridge fell into the Ohio River, causing 46 people to die. Mothman was said to have been a harbinger of the event; and afterwards, the weird being disappeared into the ether.



THE HEADLIGHTS FELL ACROSS A WINGED BEING THAT STARED AT THEM WITH GLOWING RED EYES





HOWDERFAMILY.COM/ FLICKR

ABOVE LEFT: The collapse of the Silver Bridge in Point Pleasant in 1967. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The lore of Mothman is now celebrated in Point Pleasant's Mothman Museum. **BELOW:** The town also boasts a statue of its famous winged monster. **BOTTOM:** John Keel, whose 1975 book *The Mothman Prophecies* cemented the legend.

OUT OF TIME AND SPACE

Many of the details and much of the lore of this story are due to John Keel (1930-2009; see FT253:38-42, 346:48-49, 371:58-59,), one of a handful of writers who specialised in strange phenomena in the 1960s. Keel travelled to Point Pleasant several times, teaming up with a local newspaper columnist named Mary Hyre to interview Mothman witnesses. He first wrote about the case in magazines dedicated to reports of "flying saucers", and then included a chapter on Mothman in his 1970 book *Strange Creatures Out of Time and Space*, but it was his 1975 book *The Mothman Prophecies* that would come to be seen as his magnum opus.

"I always compared it to Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*," says Loren Coleman, the prolific foratean author, founder and director of the International Cryptozoology Museum in Portland, Maine. He first corresponded with Keel in the 1960s. "I really saw Keel as taking the art form of creating a nonfiction novel, so to speak, where he took all of these incidents in West Virginia, but also in New York, the ones that personally happened to him, and put them all together even if most people wouldn't have necessarily linked them. I think it worked because he was such a good writer."

Researchers have since accused Keel of embellishing the Point Pleasant sightings to create a more interesting narrative. "Sure, I think he made it dramatic," Coleman says. "With Keel, whether it really happened or not, it happened in his mind and he felt that it had happened and he had feelings about it. People then took it as fact, whereas I read his books now and know – well, that is what John was feeling, and maybe it didn't exactly happen this way."

Robert A Goerman, who has studied ufology and foratean cases since the 1960s and operates the Nonhuman Research Agency, scrutinised Keel's work, writing a four-part report about it for *Fate* magazine entitled "The True Story of Mothman".

"I wanted to look first and see



"JOHN KEEL WANTED TO SELL BOOKS, BUT I THINK DEEP DOWN HE WANTED TO BELIEVE"

what the newspapers had to say at the time, then see what John Keel had to say and compare it with known independent sources," Goerman says. "Keel says that there were over 100 sightings – he had in his files over 100 witnesses – but it is far fewer than that. I would be surprised if it was over a dozen; of the dozen that are out there, I only take about three of them very seriously."

Goerman cites several cases where the original reports don't match the later flourishes Keel gave them. "If you put Keel's work side by side with eyewitness testimony and with newspaper reportage and other sources you find that he embellishes – some of the stuff was just so off the wall... I don't have to say that I believe that Keel exaggerated – I

can prove that he exaggerated, fabricated, and misrepresented information in black and white: it's all there. He wanted to sell books, but I think deep down he also wanted to believe."

In addition to the Mothman case, there have been many other reports of "winged weirdies" (as Coleman dubbed them in the 1970s) over the years from all around the world. Cryptozoologist Ken Gerhard, author of *Encounters with Flying Humanoids: Mothman, Manbirds, Gargoyles & Other Winged Beasts*, says he has tracked these reports on "a giant map that covers half a wall in my apartment".

"I find that there are three major groups; there are the flying humanoids, which are all over the place," Gerhard says. "Then you have the traditional Thunderbirds, or big birds, which people always describe consistently as monstrous raptors with wingspans ranging anywhere from 10 or 12 [3-3.6m] to 15 or 20 feet [4.5-6m] across. The other group is the pterosaurs or pterodactyls [see FT386:10-11]. I get a lot of reports of those, people swearing that what they saw was not a bird at all, but had leathery bat-like wings and other pterosaur-like features, like the crest on top of the head or a long, reptilian tail with a fin on the end. I've been getting a lot of those types of reports lately, particularly up in Oklahoma, West Texas, and on the East Coast, in Georgia, Tennessee, some of those areas."

In 2002, a film version of *The Mothman Prophecies* (starring Richard Gere) hit the screen and spawned a Mothman renaissance in Point Pleasant. The small town became a tourist attraction with its Mothman statue, Mothman Museum, and an annual Mothman Festival. Mothman has grown into a pop culture phenomenon: a search of Etsy and Instagram reveals hundreds of paintings, illustrations, sculptures, plush dolls, and other artistic creations from crafters around the world. Greenbriar Brewing makes a Mothman IPA; you can visit Mothman in the video game *Fallout '76*; and you can even find people participating in Mothman "cosplay" at comic cons. If the Scarberrys and Malletts

had known they were being attacked by a bona fide pop star, they might have gotten an autograph instead of speeding to the police.

But then, something unusual happened: a real-life Mothman sequel. Three reported sightings occurred in 2011, followed by a wave of sightings in 2017. All the initial sightings were within the city limits of Chicago, though the story soon grew wings as more reports came in from other cities in Illinois and the neighbouring states of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana. Reported sightings continue to this day (FT393:17).

Looking back, a decade on, we find a legacy of bitter rivalries in the paranormal field, accusations of hoaxes, eyewitnesses who seem to be genuinely terrified of what they saw, and a mystery as to what the “Chicago Mothman” phenomenon really is and how much of it is true.

MOTHMAN RETURNS

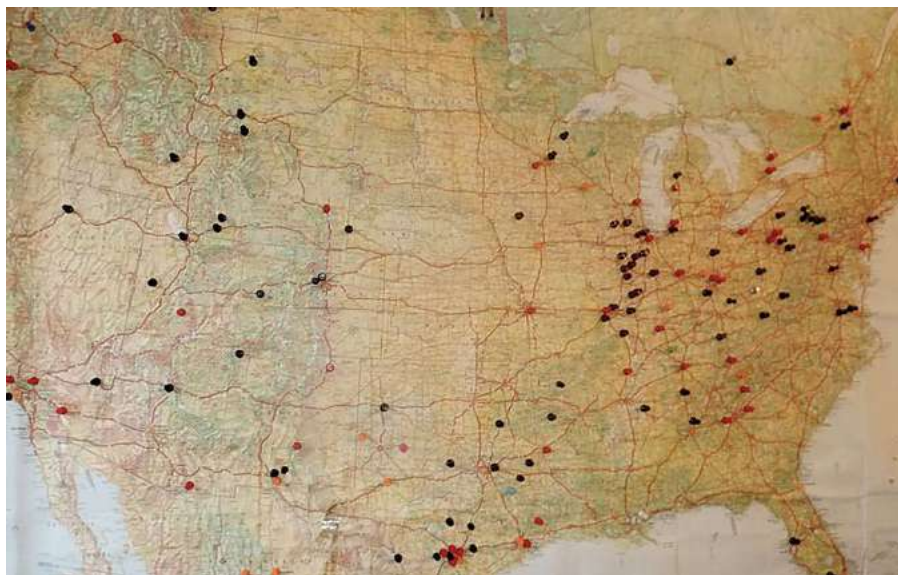
On 13 October 2011, the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) received a report with a photograph that had a blur of something bat-like in it. Chicago-based Sam Maranto, the Illinois State Director for MUFON, was the first to examine the report.

“A gentleman reported an image that he noticed in a photograph that he took on 22 August,” Maranto says. “He was in the old Chicago neighbourhood that he grew up in. He lived in Joliet – he submitted his name, phone number, and even his wife’s details. They had witnessed absolutely nothing while they were there. The reason he took the photograph is because for years he would drive by on the bus and he would notice people looking up at this Native American statue.” Maranto notes that the reason people are drawn to the statue, which is on top of a former tobacco shop, is that the position of the statue’s thumb makes it look like a phallus.

“He says because the object is in the sky, I’m reporting it as unidentified; it’s flying in the sky and it is an object, so I am submitting it to MUFON as a UFO,” Maranto says. “It makes all the sense in the world. I looked at it a little bit closer, and it looked like something more possibly along the lines of a bat or a butterfly at close range, flying between the camera and the statue, or as many people were pointing out, a kite. Well, as time went on, I gave it to a few other people. I thought that it was something mundane; we had absolutely no other reports come in. Zilch. Nothing.”

A second report came in, this time reported to UFO Clearinghouse, a site run by Manuel Navarette, an investigator originally from Texas who now lives in the Chicago area. The report detailed an alleged incident that had happened on 30 September 2011 but was not reported until 13 October.

“I got a report from some students at the University of Illinois-Chicago, and the first report talked about these two roommates getting ready to go out for the night,” Navarette says. “One of them looked in the mirror and she saw something that was looking at her from her fifth-story window. She turned



COURTESY KEN GERHARD



COURTESY SAM MARANTO

TOP: Cryptid researcher Ken Gerhard’s map of US sightings of winged weirdies. **ABOVE CENTRE:** The photo sent to MUFON showing a winged entity flying near a tobacco store Native American figure at the northwest corner of 63rd and Pulaski Road, Chicago. **ABOVE:** MUFON’s Sam Maranto, the first person to examine the photo.

around to see a pair of red eyes – there was this creature just sitting perched outside of her window, looking at her. She said she felt like ‘prey,’ like she was about to be pounced on by an eagle, and she screamed and completely lost it. Her roommate came into the room and was trying to console her, and I guess she went out to the living room and she came back in to grab something and she saw the creature herself, and they both lost it – they were both very scared and had an overwhelming feeling of fear and dread.”

The report goes on to say that while they were having this experience, one of the women’s boyfriends called, on his way to their apartment with a friend. When they arrived, they reported that they’d had their own experience while walking through a nearby park on their way to the apartment, where they saw a large creature with eyes that had “the intensity of two glowing embers” sitting on top of a basketball hoop. It flew off when it saw them.

“I got a call and they are mentioning something about how somebody wrote an article or submitted a report to UFO Clearinghouse. I didn’t know UFO Clearinghouse from a hill of beans,” says Sam Maranto. He decided to go to the site and check it out. “Here is this article about a report that was submitted, and it’s a long narrative, it’s like a short story for a creative writing class or a B-movie script. You have to read it to believe it.”

Maranto was immediately sceptical of the report: some of the details didn’t add up.

“[The report says] it flew up and it was easily seen because of the lights of the city and the nearly full Moon. Well, when cross-



LEFT: Manuel Navarette of UFO Clearinghouse.

BELOW: Humboldt Park, Chicago, one of a number of city parks to generate Mothman sightings.

THEY SAW A LARGE CREATURE WITH EYES THAT HAD ‘THE INTENSITY OF GLOWING EMBERS’

referencing the weather – it was raining that night, it was not near a full Moon... They said that they lived on the fourth floor of a five-storey building. There were no five-storey buildings there. A lot of inconsistencies, and when you add them all up, you really have to wonder.”

A third 2011 sighting was submitted to UFO Clearinghouse about an incident in Washington Park, near the University of Chicago. A witness said he was part of a group of people who saw what they first described as

a “flying man” and then an “immensely oversized sugar glider” with glowing red eyes.

“The other sighting was by five other people, in the same area, of a winged creature, and this was in view of quite a lot of students,” says Manuel Navarette. “A gentleman, I believe he said he was from Tasmania or Australia, compared it to like a very large sugar glider [a sort of possum], but he had seen it fly over and it was completely silent.”

“Someone said that they were taking a break from their studies and they were out walking and talking about their classes and noticed some commotion across the way where some people were,” Sam Maranto says. “They looked up and saw a flying man, that they thought was maybe on a hang glider. They had five different deductions within a relatively short frame of time about what this was. And the last deduction was, all of a sudden, it became a giant sugar glider. But it did not have the gentle eyes of a sugar glider, it had these red bloody eyes...”

Unlike the first report with the photograph, the other two 2011 reports did not have contact information. And with that, the creature flew quietly back into the night.

WE’RE OFF TO SEE THE WIZARD

But six years later, the Chicago Mothman was back. On 10 April 2017 a report came in that a Mothman encounter had taken place three days earlier at Oz Park, and the report was again sent to UFO Clearinghouse.



"One of the first reports I remember getting that year was the Oz Park sighting. It was a lady who lived near the park. She would do circuits around the park to exercise, and she would bring her Jack Russell Terrier with her," says Manuel Navarette. "So, as she rounded the corner, there was something scaring the dog. When she rounded a corner around the baseball fields, she encountered a 7-8ft [2.1-2.4m] tall being. Black. Apparently, the being had its wings, its back turned to her, when she initially saw it. When it noticed her presence, it turned around, and she got to look at the eyes. Big, red eyes. She says that her dog was cowering behind her, like it was scared for its life. This creature unfurled a pair of wings that were, she said, seven or eight feet from tip to tip, but shot straight up into the sky and disappeared into the trees. That one was the first one, and basically from there it snowballed."

With the Oz Park sighting, Sam Maranto began to see a subtle pattern to the reports – clues that tied the language in them to *The Wizard of Oz*. The last 2011 report, for example, was someone who said they were from Tasmania, part of Australia, often nicknamed "Oz".

"Oz is also the land of fantasy and illusion, keep that in mind," Maranto says. "A report, and by the way that went to UFO Clearinghouse, stated that on 7 April there was a sighting: a woman and her small dog are walking in Oz Park, where they have all of the statues of the characters of *The Wizard of Oz*. It's a dedication to L Frank Baum. He wrote the book in Chicago when he lived in Humboldt Park, on Humboldt Drive."

More sightings quickly followed the one in Oz Park.

"The summer of 2017 was just crazy with sightings. I believe we ended up with about 30 or 40 sightings just that summer," says Manuel Navarette. "Then they kind of tapered off for a little bit and then there was a resurgence in 2019 that is ongoing."

A woman reported to MUFON that on 15 April 2017 she was having a party on a boat off Montrose Beach when she and her friends spotted a "giant bat" that flew toward them and "circled the boat three times". It had "eyes that seemed to reflect the moonlight". It flew away, and five minutes later the party also saw a green orb in the sky. The experience gave the witness an "overwhelming sensation of dread". The next day, another report to MUFON said that a group of people had a sighting of a red-eyed, 6ft tall "big owl" in Humboldt Park around 10.30pm.

"If you know Humboldt Park, at 10.30, if you are standing around outside, you are pretty much taking your life in your own hands – it's a tough hood," says Sam Maranto. "They are out there and all of a sudden the witness sees this giant owl standing there. That was another MUFON report, number 83,325. That person had fictitious contact information, no way to contact them, no way to confirm it, verify anything. Zilch."

Another report to MUFON came in on 18



April from someone who claimed to work at the Chicago International Produce Market in the Pilsen district.

"This person gave a name – it was a correlation with a main character in *The Wizard of Oz* – but it was fictitious, as was the phone number, and email address," says Maranto.

"This was consistent with most of these reports. So, the gentleman that sent it said that he was out there around 2am, when the trucks started unloading."

Looking at the top of a building, the witness said they saw "the biggest freaking owl I've ever seen" – over six feet [1.8m] tall – with "yellowish/reddish eyes like a cat."

"Now, of course, how would you know?" Maranto says, questioning the report. "He must have been up there standing next to the damn thing or something, maybe it flew down and shook his hand, I don't know. So, they are watching it and getting really upset, very shaken. They started throwing rocks at it and it took off, and as it took off, it made squeaking noises, very similar to the brakes of trucks."

MUFON received a total of seven reports in 2017. Among them was a report

LEFT: Paranormal researcher Lon Strickler. BELOW LEFT: Phantom Task Force member Allison Jornlin, BELOW: A sketch of the Chicago Mothman based on witness descriptions given to Manuel Navarette.

on 19 May that two girls were standing at the breakwater of the Solva Marina where they witnessed "two bat-like things doing acrobatics in the sky," adding, "It was scary. Only because we didn't know what the hell they were."

"It's interesting. Each encounter, the witnesses describe an emotional response where they are afraid of these things, where fear comes into play," Maranto says. "That is something that is put into each and every one of these reports, except for the first one in 2011. That guy didn't give a damn, he just took a picture."

THE CHICAGO PHANTOM TASK FORCE

In spring and summer of 2017, emails reporting sightings began to roll in at a rapid pace, many to UFO Clearinghouse. Among the emails: On 30 April, a report claimed that a man was fishing with his son on the Little Calumet River when they heard a scream "like train brakes" and looked up to see something "solid black" the "size of a full-grown man" swoop over them; on 7 May, a report, supposedly from an Illinois State Trooper, said he and his son were walking a trail in Calumet Park when they saw a "large bat" that was "human in figure" and about "six feet in height" fly overhead; on 19 May (the same day as the report about the Solva Marina sighting) a witness said they were walking on the Chicago River Walk (in the heart of downtown Chicago) with their mother and daughter when they saw a winged being that soared over the river and then flew over the Columbus Drive Bridge, with "two large eyes that appeared red", that "looked very spooky" and had wings like a "bat."

Manuel Navarette was sharing his reports with Lon Strickler, a paranormal researcher who lives in Pennsylvania and runs a website called *Phantoms & Monsters*. He would soon be receiving his own reports and wrote a 2017 book about the cases titled *Mothman Dynasty: Chicago's Winged Humanoids*.

"I started soliciting sightings online and such, and we started getting the bulk of the reports. It was interesting, because it seems like all of the sightings were coming to us and it's still like that, I guess," Strickler says. "I've been on media enough and online enough that people start googling 'winged being, winged humanoid, Mothman,' my name pops up and they are contacting me."

The 2017 cases became a viral story online. At first the entity being reported went by several different names – the "Chicago Phantom," the "Chicago Man-Bat," and the "Chicago Mothman" – but later became





known as the “Lake Michigan Mothman”, as the sightings spread from Chicago to other parts of Illinois as well as Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

Lon Strickler put together a Chicago Phantom Task Force to investigate the cases – a collection of cryptozoologists, ufologists, and other paranormal investigators. Strickler’s team included Manuel Navarette, and Tobias and Emily Wayland, a couple from Madison, Wisconsin, who run the Singular Fortean Society. Researcher and author Rosemary Ellen Guiley, who passed away in 2019 (see FT385:28), was also a member.

“I kind of got in on the ground floor of this thing and took the reins and started doing the investigation,” says Strickler. “As soon as it started snowballing, I put the original team together. We have been pretty steady about following up on these reports. I think we all have our own opinions about what this is, which is good.”

Another (now former) member of the Chicago Phantom Task Force was a researcher from Milwaukee named Allison Jornlin. At first, she was excited about the Mothman story – Chicago is a short hour-and-a-half drive from Milwaukee. Allison’s own cousin had a convincing story about seeing a flying creature he’d spotted in the 1980s in the skies above a suburb of Milwaukee called Brookfield.

“My cousin tells us the story of a strange flying creature that he experienced, I think it was 1988. He was awaiting the birth of his first son, he’s in this hospital and it’s situated near a bluff area,” Jornlin says. “There is a big floor-to-ceiling window. He was sitting in the waiting room, and he saw this strange flying creature, which, the first time he described it, he said was a dragon.” Jornlin, who used to work at a Native American school, thinks her cousin may have seen a Thunderbird.

Intrigued by the Chicago Mothman sightings, Allison made plans to start driving back and forth to see spots where the sightings had happened and shoot short videos reporting from the locations. “At first it was positive. I got on the map for a while – I got added by Lon Strickler to the investigative group, ‘just as a courtesy,’ in his words, but I got added,” Allison says, noting that the group communicated by Facebook messenger. “Unfortunately, there was nothing that I derived from that group that’s helped me in my investigations. I just took what was freely available on the web for everyone. Not that I didn’t want to collaborate – I certainly did.”

Another member, Tobias Wayland of the Singular Fortean Society, had been added to the group after he developed an interest in the case and had interviewed Manuel Navarette and Lon Strickler about the reports they were receiving in June and July of 2017.

“I didn’t know who those guys were. I had never heard of them,” Wayland says, but added that he wanted to interview them for his own reporting on the cases for his website. “I was also curious about what kind of investigation was going into this, like what they were doing to look into things and what they thought after investigating the sightings.”

The Singular Fortean Society was invited into the investigation.

“At that point, I’d gone from covering this on the outside to being on the inside of the investigation,” Wayland says. “It was about that time we started receiving our own sightings reports. Once our circula-

tion became big enough, people started reaching out to Singular Fortean Society directly to say that they had seen something weird.”

THE HOUSE THAT MOTHMAN BUILT

At the same time the Chicago Mothman cases were starting to roll out, Seth Breedlove, creator and director of the Small Town Monsters documentary series, was about to catch a break with his fourth documentary, *The Mothman of Point Pleasant*.

“We made *Minerva Monster* in 2015. We didn’t really make any money on it – there is some behind-the-scenes stuff that went on, like I got in a fist fight with a producer at a screening,” Breedlove says, of his first documentary. “The money got split up and then I really didn’t make any money on it, but we made enough on DVD and T-shirt sales that I took that money and put it into making *Beast of Whitehall*.” A third Bigfoot documentary, *Boggy Creek Monster*, followed, but none of these “made much money,” Breedlove says. Tired of documenting Bigfoot stories, Breedlove turned to the story that originally caught his interest in the paranormal – Mothman.

“My first introduction to the paranormal was *The Mothman Prophecies* movie. Before that, I didn’t realise there were people who believed that stuff was real, so it kind of blew

my mind – not that I thought it was cool; at the time, I still thought it was super dorky,” Breedlove says. “My sister was obsessed with Richard Gere and so she watched that movie, and she bought the book. I picked it up, and it blew my mind that the Mothman was a real thing. That was my introduction to the paranormal as a concept.”

Breedlove had concerns about making *The Mothman of Point Pleasant* documentary, mostly because the story had been “cov-

ered to infinity” on TV and in other documentaries. He decided to take a trip to Point Pleasant to talk to Jeff Wamsley, the author of *Mothman: Behind the Red Eyes*, owner of the Mothman Museum, and an organiser of the annual Mothman Festival. Wamsley revealed to Breedlove that he had tape recordings of interviews with some of the original Mothman witnesses, and Breedlove decided to make a documentary focusing on those interviews.

“We started filming in November of 2016, like a week after the *Boggy Creek Monster* premiered. We started filming and we launched the Kickstarter in late January or early February,” Breedlove says. “We made *Mothman* over late 2016 and early 2017 and then it was released in May.”



Breedlove and his crew were busy filming their next documentary, *Invasion on Chestnut Ridge*, when *The Mothman of Point Pleasant* went live. When they took a break to see how the release was going, they found the documentary was climbing all of Amazon's bestseller lists.

"It was already number one in horror, and it had done that in like 10 hours. We started to see it show up in different categories and charting in the bestsellers. We shot all of that day and we got back to our cabin that evening and by the time we were getting ready to go to bed, it was the number 8 bestselling movie on Amazon, period. We went to bed and the next morning it had moved up to 5 or 4. *Star Wars: Rogue One* was out at the time, and it was ahead of *Rogue One*!"

"The timing was good in so many ways," Breedlove says of the film's success. The release tied into the 15-year anniversary of *The Mothman Prophecies* movie, and the 50th anniversary of the Silver Bridge collapse in Point Pleasant, often interpreted as a climax of the Point Pleasant encounters. And, of course, there had been significant buzz about the dozen or more Chicago sightings that had been reported by May 2017.

The Mothman of Point Pleasant made Small Town Monsters a viable career for Breedlove and his wife. "Adrienne and I had just had our son, Tommy, and she was getting ready to go back to work," Breedlove says. "I said 'I could use help with all of this stuff – if you want to be the business manager for Small Town Monsters, you could quit your job and we will put all of our effort into this.' And that was all because of the *Mothman* movie being as big as it was."

EYEWITNESS ENCOUNTERS

Despite many of the reports not having contact information, investigators were getting out to interview some eyewitnesses. Jack Chavez, an investigator living in Chicago's Pilsen district, read an article from *Vice* that mentioned a bouncer at a bar in the Logan Square neighbourhood who says he saw a dinosaur-like entity fly above him in the summer of 2017.

"He was out on a cigarette break, and he saw a pterodactyl-like creature flying not very high above him. I was able to meet up with him. I read the article that talked about the sightings, and it said that the guy was a bouncer. It doesn't give a name, and no contact information, but I wanted to interview this guy, so I drove to the bar." After asking staff members, he found the right person and interviewed him.

"He told me about his encounter, and I took notes and it matched up with the submitted report," Chavez says. "He came across as very sincere. What I took away is that he was in awe of what he saw."



It's interesting that we call it a 'Mothman' sighting, because it was around the time of the Mothman craze and all of these monster sightings. But it really had no attachment to Mothman. I mean his description was of a giant pterodactyl and he feels like that is what he saw. Whatever it was, I believe in his sincerity."

Shetan Noir, an author and researcher from Michigan, was also following the Mothman sightings. She spoke to a witness at a small cryptozoology convention in Goshen, Indiana, who told her that when he was 18, he and his friends were in a nearby marsh looking for frogs when they heard "wings, like a large swooping sound".

"This was at dusk," Noir says. "They were anticipating that it would be a sandhill crane or something like that, but he said what they saw was a creature with muscular legs that landed in the water, and then it was walking, straight legged with just a slight bend in the knee, kind of like a swishing. So, my guess is that it would be trying to stir up fish."

The witness said the animal was "the size of a grown man" and had "greyish leathery wings. They could not really make out the head because it was ducked down – it seemed to be looking for something in the water. One of his buddies kind of freaked out and started to make some noise and it startled

the creature, so it launched back up into the air and flew off. He wanted to know what I thought it was."

In early 2018, Lon Strickler passed a report on to Tobias and Emily Wayland, the husband-and-wife team who founded the Singular Fortean Society, about a sighting in Mukwonago, Wisconsin, about 90 miles (145km) northwest of Chicago.

The witness said he'd had an encounter in spring 2017, the same time as the explosion in Chicago sightings, but had been unsure where to report

LEFT: A sketch of Mothman based on witness descriptions given to Lon Strickler. BELOW: Investigator Jack Chavez.

it. The Waylands arranged to meet him at the scene of the sighting.

"He certainly seemed authentic, in my estimation. What he said happened is that he was driving home one night, and it was pretty late, I think it was midnight or so, and he was talking on the phone with his friend," Tobias Wayland says. The witness told them that he pulled into a gravel driveway to finish his conversation. He looked at a lamppost about 50 feet (15m) away when he saw something lurking behind it.

"He became aware of the silhouette of this huge *something* backlit by the light. He decided he was going to turn his headlights on," Wayland says. "He thought maybe it was a person, but it seemed awfully big to be a person. So, he turns his headlights on, and he says what he saw was eight or nine feet [2.4-2.7m] tall, and these are his words – a *humanoid bat dragon*."

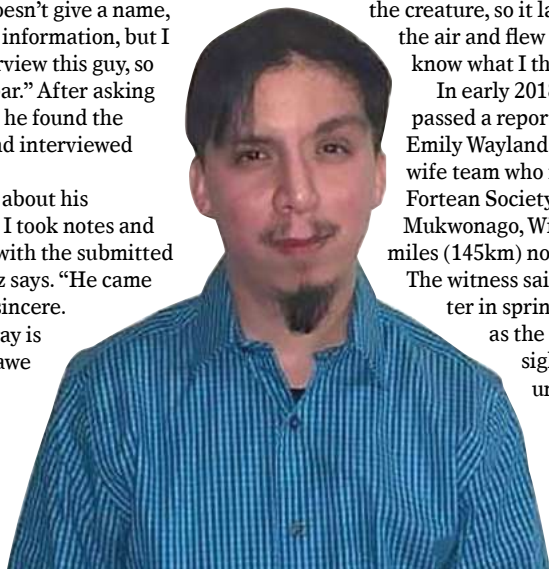
Wayland believes the unusual description comes from trying to name the impossible: "We get so many interesting descriptions of these winged beings, and often if you were just to take them on the surface you would think that there is a huge variation, but really what I think we are seeing is people struggling to describe something that is so far outside of their understanding that they just don't have the vocabulary."

The witness watched the creature for a few seconds before it blurred and then vanished. "He can't decide if that meant that it teleported or disappeared, or maybe it had moved so fast that it was out of his line of sight, faster than he could register," Wayland says. "At that point, he didn't want to be outside anymore, which I think was pretty understandable under the circumstances."

Wayland says he was impressed with the witness's sincerity, adding that even a year later the man was still visibly shaken recalling the event. "When you're face to face with another grown man who is so scared by what he experienced that on an otherwise pleasant, sunny late spring morning he is sweating and shaking telling you his story, that is powerful – that means something," Wayland says. "This isn't a joke to him. I struggle at times, I think, to express that to people. To a lot of people this is fun and games, but I can tell you it's not a joke to the people with whom I have spoken. This is serious, and it is something that could have a huge impact, and that was evident when I talked to this guy."

Next issue: Mothman turns Mexican, jealousies erupt, and things fall apart...

➡ **TEA KRULOS** is a journalist and author from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His books include *Monster Hunters* and *American Madness*. You can find more info and his "Tea's Weird Week" column at teakrulos.com.



MAGIC IN HIS BONES

ROB GANDY talks to Dr Matteo Borrini about how he combines forensic anthropology and magic and juggles his many fortean interests with his academic career.



COURTESY MATTEO BORRINI

The annual Liverpool LightNight is a fun, free event that takes place across the city and I always check for its weirdest events, such as 'The Cryptid Petting Zoo' (FT333:52-53). Back in 2019, my attention was drawn to 'Torquema-da: In The Mind Of The Inquisitor' delivered by Dr Matteo Borrini.¹ The packed room was thoroughly entertained by a terrific blend of stage magic and a history of the rituals and practice of mediæval witchcraft, witch-hunting and the Inquisition. In addition, as the theme of the event was 'Ritual', Dr Borrini had organised, in another room, a Cabinet of Curiosities that included: a mummified fairy; a vampire hunting kit; an alleged impaled vampire heart; Victorian spiritualistic paraphernalia; and an original witch bottle. I subsequently discovered that Matteo is actually a colleague of mine at Liverpool John Moores University, albeit in a different Faculty: he is Principal Lecturer in Forensic Anthropology. He is also President of the Liverpool Mahatma Magic Circle.² It was clear that an interview with someone called Gandy was predestined!

ROB GANDY: What exactly is forensic anthropology?

MATTEO BORRINI: Forensic anthropology is the analysis of human skeletons for legal purposes. As forensic anthropologists, we reconstruct the ancestry, sex, age at death, and marks of physical stress or disease of an unknown individual to give them an identity. We are involved in cases of missing persons and unknown victims of murder. We can help investigators and medical examiners not only to reconstruct the identity of these individuals, but also the nature of wounds, and the cause and manner of death.

In Italy, I am appointed as an expert witness for the State Prosecutor's Office, and contribute to the identification and repatriation of WWII soldiers.³ A fairly recent example is the recovery of an Italian torpedoman who died in 1940 on a tiny island in Sudan. When searching for missing people, an archaeological approach can be applied, which includes surveys, geophysical analysis, cadaver dogs, and of course the use of excavation and stratigraphic techniques to recover buried remains.

RG: How did you get to be a forensic anthropologist?

MB: My first degree was in archaeology but my Masters and PhD were in biological anthropology. I became interested in the biological aspects of archaeology, and my preferred approach was forensic. What I mean is that both archaeologists and forensic scientists analyse small traces of past events to reconstruct them. I found it possible to direct my work not only to study ancient cultures, but also to help families of missing people, murder victims and their relatives. This is why I focused on forensic anthropology.

RG: I note from your CV that your research has included quite a few fortean subjects [see panel on p38]. How did they come about? And do you read *Fortean Times*?

MB: Yes I have often read *Fortean Times*. I enjoy the magazine very much and it is perfect for when I fly home to Italy. I guess that I have always been open to weird stuff – an interest that has developed over the years –



ABOVE: Matteo performing stage magic at one of his shows. **BELOW:** Recovering the remains of a WWII Italian serviceman from Sudan as part of his work for the State Prosecutor's Office.

but it is more a case of these topics finding me rather than me seeking them out. For example, who could have guessed that an excavation of a mass grave in Venice would yield evidence of a suspected vampire? And it was only because of my training in bloodstain pattern analysis that I was asked to participate in the investigation of the Turin Shroud. Perhaps my voodoo conference paper did reflect my forteen interests a bit, but it sought to address the genuine complexity of investigating ritual crimes. It is also related to my collaboration with the Italian Group for Research and Information on Cults and the Roman Catholic Church in term of religions and exorcisms.

RG: Your LightNight presentation had a strong focus on witchcraft. Is this a particular interest?

MB: It's something that has grown over time. I am very interested in the history of witchcraft and the Inquisition and related topics. There is so much false information that is told about both that it is essential to see how this came about. Many of the supposed torture methods that everyone has heard about are actually fakes that were created in the Victorian era. Arguably the best example is the Iron Maiden – the idea of a human-sized box with lots of interior spikes was a myth which reflected perceptions that the Middle Ages were cruel times and the Church was bloodthirsty.

It is also important to see the various stories in the context of the post-French Revolution political push against the Roman Catholic Church – the more gruesome the alleged torture methods, the more the Church lost influence.

"I AM A FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGIST BY DAY AND A MAGICIAN BY NIGHT"



RG: How did you get involved in stage magic?

MB: I became interested in magic when I was around eight years old and was given my first 'magic set' as a present. This led to me performing tricks for my family and friends. I was so keen that I told my parents that I wanted to go on a magic course to be trained

as a professional magician, rather than go to high school. Fortunately, they persuaded me to follow a proper academic career! As a result my 'magic monster' slept for several years, but it awoke when I was on a trip to Czechoslovakia with my parents. I was with my dad at a currency exchange when a man offered him a better deal. He looked perfectly respectable, but when he was giving the bankroll to my father, dad smiled and said: "No, give me the other one." The man immediately ran away – which saved our money. I asked dad what had happened and he said that he had glimpsed the man switch the money that he had openly counted in front of us with a smaller amount. He was able to spot the scam because as a kid he did magic tricks with his cousin and they put on little shows for friends. This made me realise that magical skill can not only entertain, but also help to fight fraud and debunk charlatans.

From there, I practised and developed my skills over time and eventually created my act as a stage magician. Of course, there were many professional magicians that I watched and learned from. I particularly admire SiIvan, the Italian 'Maestro', and the bizarre magic of Eugene Burger. I very much appreciated Paul Daniels for his ability to perform a wide range of tricks and effects in front of many millions of people. In particular, he had giant skills as an entertainer, even with what can be called a 'simple' effect; this taught me that the magic is played by the performer and not by the trick itself.

RG: I was in the audience for one of Paul Daniels's very first television appearances in the 1970s – the BBC programme *For My Next Trick*, which involved several different magicians. He was clearly the best there.

MB: Of course, there are many other magicians I admire – far too many to list. But I should highlight that I have a particular interest in mentalism, which is where you appear to perform feats that demonstrate extraordinary mental powers, such as mind-reading. In this field Derren Brown and David Berglas are my models. Knowing how to perform such stunts enables me to debunk fraudulent psychics who claim to be able to talk with the dead, and to help with police investigations. So over time I have been able to compartmentalise my life into two worlds. Effectively I am a forensic anthropologist by day and a magician by night! It is where the two worlds occasionally meet that things get really interesting. Nevertheless, I admit that I was a little concerned about how I might be able to continue my magic interests when I started at John Moores in 2013 – especially coming from another country and not knowing anyone locally. Fortunately, I came across the Liverpool Mahatma Magic Circle at Liverpool's World Museum, during a 'magic marathon'. The club quickly became my English family, and I can now say that I have more friends and links here than in my homeland.

MATTEO'S FORTEAN RESEARCH



LEFT: The remains of an elderly female found on the island of Lazzaretto Nuovo with a brick placed in her mouth. **BELOW:** Reconstructing the position of the victim's arms during crucifixion.

THE VENICE VAMPIRE

The island of Lazzaretto Nuovo, which lies around two miles northeast of Venice, was used from 1468 as a quarantine area for sailors arriving from potentially infected lands.¹ During the major pandemics that struck the city in the 16th and 17th centuries, the island became a hospital for those affected by plague, and mass graves were dug for the patients that died. From 2006 to 2008, Matteo was the director of the excavation of the cemetery area of the island used for the pandemics of 1576 (in which the artist Titian died) and 1630. During this project the grave of an elderly female was found: she had a brick placed in her mouth. The excavation was conducted using the latest forensic archaeology and anthropology techniques, including methods applied by modern police for crime scene investigation. The analysis, and research into practices of that period, led Matteo to the conclusion that these were the remains of a female 'vampire', and that the brick had been jammed between her jaws to prevent her feeding on plague victims [FT249:18].

Matteo explains that the succession of plagues, like the Black Death, that ravaged Europe between 1300 and 1700 fostered the belief that vampires were behind their spread, mainly because the decomposition of corpses was not well understood. It would be the case that when gravediggers reopened mass graves they would occasionally come across bodies bloated by decomposition gas, with their hair apparently still growing and with blood-like fluids seeping from their noses and mouths. A shroud covering a corpse's face can be decayed by bacteria in the mouth, thereby revealing

the teeth; so vampires became known as 'shroud-eaters', or *nachzehrer*. Unsurprisingly, people thought these corpses to be still alive – or 'undead'.

The body of the female in question would have undoubtedly displayed some or all of the above, resulting in the placement of the brick. Matteo said that this was the first time that a multidisciplinary approach had succeeded in reconstructing the ritual of exorcism of a vampire and had helped authenticate how the myth of vampires was born.

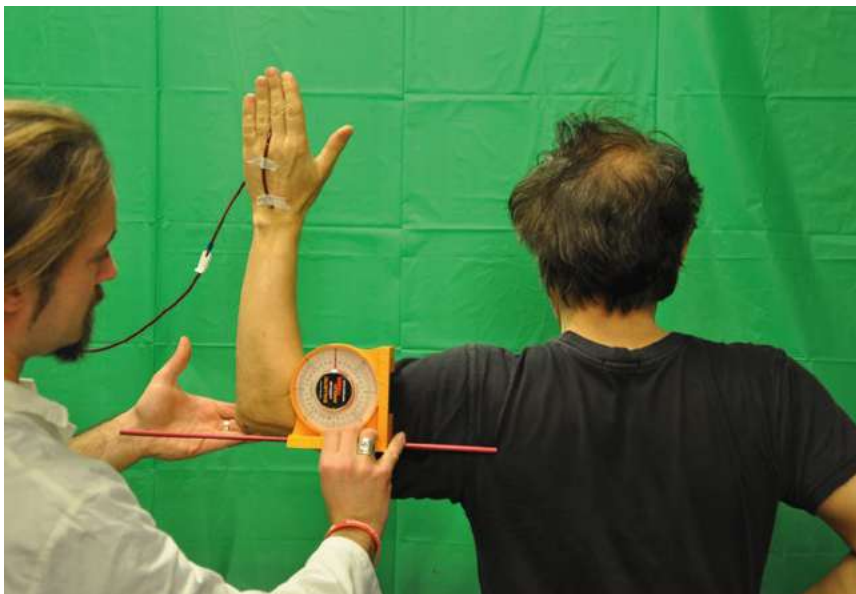
THE TURIN SHROUD

Luigi Garlaschelli, a chemist and one of Matteo's CICAP colleagues, was aware that

Matteo was trained in bloodstain pattern analysis (BPA). Luigi was interested in the alleged bloodstains associated with the Turin Shroud, and therefore he asked Matteo to work with him to analyse the patterns, which resulted in a paper published in the prestigious *Journal of Forensic Sciences*.² Using a living volunteer (Garlaschelli himself), the objective was to reconstruct the most likely position of the arms and the body during the blood flow, which might help to understand how the ancient death penalty of crucifixion – of which almost nothing is known – was carried out. Therefore they were only dealing with the patterning rather than the controversy about the nature of the stains.

The question of how the Shroud's stains relate to the position of a crucified man has been researched before, as long ago as the 19th century when French physician Pierre Barbet experimentally confirmed his figures by nailing human corpses to a homemade cross (see FT326:38-41). However, Matteo and Luigi were the first to analyse the bloodstains according to the modern standards of the forensic sciences. Assuming that the red stains were actually blood from crucifixion wounds, their BPA focus was on the wrist, the forearms, the 'lance wound' and the blood stains near the waist.

They concluded that the alleged flowing patterns from different areas of the body were not consistent with each other. Even if there were different episodes of bleeding (e.g., due to body movement or post-mortem bleeding), they were undocumented, and those for the lumbar stains appeared



to be unrealistic. Such inconsistencies suggested that they were not real bloodstains, and threw into question the authenticity of the Shroud itself, pointing towards it being an artistic or 'didactic' representation from the 14th century. The BPA also supported historical records, radiocarbon dating and chemical analysis relating to the Shroud.

VOODOO, ZOMBIES & RITUAL CRIME

In 2017, Matteo gave a presentation at the 69th Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, hosted in New Orleans.³ He illustrated the complex challenge of ritual crime investigation in modern multicultural Western society, with its variety of beliefs and religious systems. He stressed that it is always necessary to first confirm if there are ritualistic symbols actually present at a crime scene, as only then is it possible to recognise their origin and ascription to a particular cultural group. It is important to realise that the same symbol may have very different, and sometimes opposite, meanings, depending on the culture using it.

Matteo argued that despite Western society being inclusive, some ritual aspects of ethnic religions are perceived as particularly mysterious and viewed with suspicion and fear. For example, voodoo is frequently associated with horror and crime in films, which include transforming people into the living dead by rituals. However, voodoo is a recognised religion and a much more complex phenomenon than how it is (usually wrongly) depicted in movies. The scientific community has tried to provide rational explanations for how ritual phenomena might work, with zombification initially believed to involve chemicals such as tetrodotoxin (see **FT178:28-30, 333:24**).

Matteo highlighted that, especially when people are dealing with very complex or gory crimes, there is a great risk of symbols being 'recognised' when they aren't actually there, which can be due to a poor knowledge of ethnic beliefs. But if alleged symbolic elements are present and genuine, then they must be carefully interpreted and classified according to the group to which they belong, without simple generalisations. Equally, when symbols are recognised and classified, the forensic relevance must be established and whether there is a correlation between the ritual and the crime. Critically, the symbolic elements may provide a cultural/ethnic profile of the person(s) involved at the scene.

NOTES

¹ www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-vampire/vampire-uneearthed-in-venice-plague-grave-idUSTRE52B-4RU20090312; <https://archive.archaeology.org/online/features/halloween/plague.html>

² <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1556-4029.13867>

³ www.aafs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017Proceedings.pdf

RG: How has being a magician influenced your attitude to fortaean phenomena?

MB: It has enabled me to recognise where people who claim to have psychic or 'paranormal' abilities are using tricks of deception. I do get approached by people claiming such powers, and what I can say is that if they are a fake or a charlatan, I will be able to find out and tell them. If they are sincere in their belief in their powers, then again, I will find out, but I will gently explain what is happening to them so that they understand. These insights led me to getting involved with the Italian Committee for the Investigation of Claims on the Paranormal (CICAP), which promotes scientific and critical investigation of supposed paranormal phenomena.⁴ I have been a scientific consultant to it for over a decade.

RG: So would you describe yourself as a 'materialist sceptic'?

MB: Absolutely not. I am an open-minded scientist and a man of [Roman Catholic] faith. The two are quite separate and distinct. I believe that there is nothing that is 'paranormal' – everything we know is covered by science. But I am the first to acknowledge that science does not necessarily know everything that there is, and therefore as science expands and develops we learn more and more. Consequently, something that might be deemed 'paranormal' today might be found to be a new facet of science at a future date and become explainable.

RG: I would say that this makes you a classic fortaean! But tell me, I gather that you have regularly appeared on Italian television and that you have worked with the Vatican...

MB: Yes. I appeared on a weekly live prime time television show called *Quarto Grado*. This provides in-depth journalism focusing on current or recent criminal cases that have fascinated or divided the public. It has a multidisciplinary approach, with interviews, insights and studio debates that can include some of those involved and experts from various fields – which is where I came in as a forensic anthropologist. Particular attention has always been given to the victim's point of view.

With regards to the Vatican, I admit that I was a little surprised to receive an invitation to assist in the training of exorcists! Strictly speaking it was not the Vatican itself that invited me but the GRIS (Group for Research and Information on Cults), which is an Italian Catholic association, approved by the Italian Bishops' Conference.⁵ They asked me to teach a course to exorcists about alleged paranormal experiences so that they might better understand what might actually be happening. In Italy, many ordinary Catholics often consider out-of-the-ordinary experiences to be paranormal, when there is a non-supernatural explanation to be found. Therefore, I set out the

sorts of things that exorcists should look out for, so that they can identify misperceptions and frauds, and distinguish between them.

RG: Finally, can you tell me more about your Cabinet of Curiosities? How does it help you with your magic?

MB: Despite many mentalists having a tendency to be minimalist in their presentation, I prefer to use my Cabinet of Curiosities to provide objects that can help create an atmosphere. You see, atmosphere is an essential component of magic. It creates an environment where the audience can become completely immersed in an 'enchanted' narration. Magic is not limited to the effect, to the routine, but is made by what precedes and what follows the effect. There is a power in possessing objects, and I like to have a story for each piece, as the object itself and eventually the magic are the 'special effects' to enhance the story-telling. The superfluous then becomes essential in the creation of the magical narrative framework that allows the audience to lose themselves in the whole incantation. The objects establish the credibility of magic.

RG: What are the most interesting objects in your Cabinet of Curiosities, and are you looking to add new ones?

MB: A Cabinet of Curiosities can provide an opportunity to amaze visitors, and thereby teach them unusual aspects of history and science by catching their attention with objects that they will not see in any museum. Of course, the provenance of the objects must always remain a secret – are the mummified fairy and impaled vampire heart real?! Future objects I would like to get my hands on? I am always interested in debunking mediums and like to acquire any spiritualistic and séance paraphernalia. A spirit trumpet would be nice – and a plaster cast of a Yeti footprint would be great!

NOTES

¹ <http://lighthnightliverpool.co.uk/whats-on/torquemada-in-the-mind-of-the-inquisitor/>

² www.mahatma-magic-circle.uk/

³ Matteo is an honorary member of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission: Commonwealth-Italian Joint Committee

⁴ www.cicap.org/en/about_cicap.htm

⁵ GRIS deals basically with 'cult' related issues; originally it focused on the Watchtower Society, but today it also deals with other groups. www.kelebekler.com/cesnur/txt/gris-gb.htm

Matteo Borrini will be appearing at **Weird Weekend North 2023** as 'The Great Borrini', where he will give an interactive performance: 'Torquemada: In The Mind Of The Inquisitor'. www.weirdweekendnorth.com

➡ **ROB GANDY** is a Visiting Professor at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, a lifelong fortaean and a regular contributor to FT.

GOAT RIDERS IN THE SKY

MATT SALUSBURY goes in search of the *bokkenrijders* – the armed robbers who allegedly rode through the air on flying billy goats, swore oaths to the Devil and terrorised the population of Belgium and the Netherlands in the 18th century.

For most of the 18th century, border provinces of what's now the Netherlands and Belgium were gripped by a reign of terror. Mysterious gangs of armed robbers carried out nocturnal raids and blackmailed the population with *brandbrieven* (arson letters): if the gangs' demands for money were not met, your house would be burnt down.

These *bendes* (gangs) carried out arson attacks and robberies with great violence. Victims were tortured, raped and killed during their operations, with children among those murdered. Gang leader Joseph Kerckhoffs allegedly gave the order during one robbery "in the event of resistance to shoot dead or strike down everyone."¹ Preferred targets were church estates, priests' homes, farmhouses (preferably isolated ones), inns, monasteries and castles. The gangs had an apparently supernatural ability to cover distances at speed and to melt away before law enforcement could mobilise. The gangs became known as the *bokkenrijders* – the 'billy goat riders' or 'buck riders'.

Defendants testified in court that gang members used witchcraft – they flew through the air riding on the backs of *bokken* or billy goats. They were said to have sworn "ungodly oaths" in which they renounced God and pledged themselves to the Devil. Courts heard how in their robberies they used magical "hands of glory", severed, dried and pickled human hands, to prevent their victims raising the alarm. They were alleged to have gangs of 50 to 100 or more at their disposal, or even small armies.

An estimated 600 *bokkenrijders* were tried and convicted in three waves over a 75-year period. At least 350 – nearly all men – were executed. But did the *bokkenrijder* gangs even exist?

ROBBERY IN THE DEVIL'S NAME

The provinces where the *bokkenrijders* committed "robbery in the Devil's name" are now roughly Nederlands-Limburg – a province in the southern corner of the Netherlands – and Belgian-Limburg, a border province of Belgium. Some operated in Herzogenrath, now a corner of the federal state of North Rhine Westphalia in Germany.

Back in the days of the *bokkenrijders*, the



region was the *Land van Overmaas* – the Land over the River Meuse (*Maas* in Dutch; hence the city of Maastricht). An earlier peace treaty had divided up this territory between the Republic of the Seven Provinces of the Netherlands and the Spanish Habsburg Empire. The Spanish territories were ceded to Austria from 1714, so in the time of the *bokkenrijders* there were two versions of the Land over the Meuse. There

was the "Staats" version of *Overmaas* – Dutch territory. The States General, the Parliament of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces of the Netherlands, was officially very Protestant. It didn't trust its Catholic provinces of the South, so the very Catholic Dutch *Overmaas* was under direct rule by a States General-appointed Guardian.

Next door was another version of the *Overmaas*, ruled by a Councillor of State on behalf of the Austrian Empire, with the Empress Maria Theresa as its sovereign for much of the *bokkenrijder* period (it's now part of Belgium). The *Overmaas* included the Land of Hertogenrath – nominally part of the Austrian Empire in whose name a steward of a local abbey ruled, but effectively an autonomous dukedom where a dialect of German was spoken. There were "neutral" roads connecting scattered bits of Austrian or Dutch territory with each other. Within the *Overmaas* were many prince bishops and abbots of monasteries that were also local lords, with their own courts, ensuring a chaotic administration of justice.

Being the border between empires, the *Overmaas* bore the scars of several recent wars. Both versions remained backwaters of their respective states, but as border provinces they were heavily taxed and compelled to billet troops. Some saw the *modus operandi* of the *bokkenrijder* gangs as inspired by the armies that passed through the region, plundering and living off the land.

BLACKFACE BANDITS

The earliest documented robbery by a *bokkenrijder* gang was in August 1726: silverware was looted from the castle at Huis Oost near the Dutch city of Valkenburg. The robbers tried to fence the loot through pawnbroker Levi Jacobs in the town of Sittard. When Jacobs asked how they came by it, they threatened to shoot him dead, forcing him to accept 1440 guilders-worth of silver. The robbers showed up at Huis Oost again in 1738.

The *bokkenrijders* covered their faces with scarves and wore wigs during robberies to disguise themselves. One Michel Hendrix was sentenced to death as a *bokkenrijder* after a search of his house uncovered a quantity of wigs that he couldn't account for. Witnesses occasionally described masked



NICK SMEETS / EXPO BOKKENRIJDERS: AS THIEVES IN THE NIGHT?, 2021

FACING PAGE: A plaque commemorating the *bokkenrijders* on the wall of Valkenburg Museum, the Netherlands. **ABOVE:** A painting of 'The *bokkenrijders* of Maaseik' by artist Nick Smeets (2020). **BELOW:** A *brandbrief* or arson letter sent to Linskes Reijnder of Geistingen in March 1785 with a demand for 200 guilders.

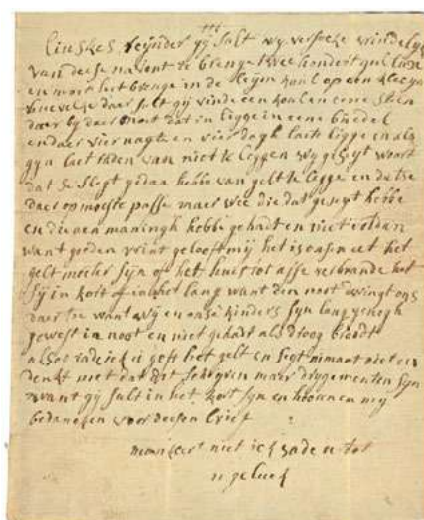
women in men's clothes among the *bokkenrijders* keeping watch during robberies.

In 1753 in the West-Herck region of the Austrian Netherlands, one Francis van Leuwe led a local *bokkenrijders* gang known as the *zwartmakers* ("those who made themselves black"). This was a revival of an old name. The original *zwartmakers*, who had already passed into folklore by the 1750s, were a gang operating further north, in the Dutch provinces of North Brabant and Gelderland, in the 1690s.

Jacobus van der Schlossen led the original *zwartmakers* – ex-soldiers who hid in the forests of Slabroek. They blacked up for their night raids to disguise their faces. They would batter down the doors of houses with thick poles and lock the residents in their cellars while they robbed them. Van der Schlossen was eventually hanged in Ravenstein Castle in 1695, in front of 20,000 spectators. Other *zwartmaker* gangs operated from the heath at Teteringen near Breda and in Gelderland at around the same time.

Supernatural elements attached themselves to the *zwartmaker* stories, as they later did to the *bokkenrijders*. Anna Dirks, hanged in 1707 in Rhenen along with her mother and her aunt, was said to have brought to robberies a severed child's hand that she burned to bewitch the residents of houses so they didn't wake up. Van der Schlossen was said to have once avoided capture by

SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS ATTACHED THEMSELVES TO THE BOKKENRIJDERS



jumping into a marsh and transforming into a bullrush, while the corpses of the hanged *zwartmakers* were said to roam the sites of

their execution in Gelderland

The peaks of *bokkenrijder* robbery came in 1726-1743, 1749-1750 and 1751-1774. While *bokkenrijder* crimes within the Dutch Republic were predominantly robberies, in the Austrian Netherlands they were also blackmailers, extorting money through their *brandbrieven* letters. Many such "arson letters" survive in the Limburg historical archives, usually demanding the addressee leaves money in a particular place – under a stone, in a hole in the ground, by a wayside cross or shrine. One such letter, from Arnold de Wal to the innkeeper at Gerlingen, warned: "I will set fire to the four corners of your house" in the event of non-payment.

In the rural municipality of Wellen in the Austrian Netherlands there were between 20 and 30 such threatening letters received in less than a year in 1773. It was in one of these arson letters that the term *bokkenrijder* first appears. Its author wrote that "the Devil hunts us, now you shall know how the *bokkenrijders* live... through the Devil's intervention we rule..." The name *bokkenrijder* started to appear in local court documents. Previously there had just been "gangs", "robbery gangs", "ungodly thieves" or "the Overmaas gangs". By 1790, *bokkenrijder* was a term in common use, with interrogators in Bree (now in Belgium) asking suspects if they were "with the gang of Overmaas or Valkenburg or the so-called *bokkenrijders*".



METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

ABOVE LEFT: A meeting of the *bokkenrijders* shown in a mural in Valkenburg's 'Velvet Cave'. ABOVE RIGHT: The idea of flying goats already existed in European witch-lore, as in this engraving by Dürer (c.1500). BELOW: A modern view of flying goats in a 1956 entry in the popular Belgian comic book series *Suske en Wiske*.

FLYING GOATS

According to Belgian folklorist Signe Maene, riderless flying goats were already a phenomenon in Belgian skies before the *bokkenrijders* made their *bokkenvluchten* – flights on the back of billy goats. Some were afraid to go out at night because of “ghost goats” that “screeched eerily” as they flew overhead. Less fearful folk would gather to watch their flights.²

At the time, a day's ride on good roads in daylight was 51km (32 miles), a day's walk was 40km (25 miles). *Bokkenrijder* “goat flights” seem to have shaved at least an hour or two off usual travel times, with journeys by horse at night next to impossible anyway. At least six written testimonies of nocturnal “billy goat flights” from the Netherlands and four from Belgium survive.

Mathijs Smeets told how in September 1773, after an oath ceremony in the Saint Rosa Chapel in Sittard, he was led to a crossroads out of town where a “long-bodied, black thing appeared, standing no more than a few feet from the ground.” His description is vague: “We were so amazed we couldn't tell what it looked like.” The thing resembled some enormous dachshund-type goat. All 42 *bokkenrijders* present could climb up onto its back, with the gang's ‘major’ and ‘captain’ both “sitting at the head of it”. On this beast, they were whisked through the air from Venlo to Roermond in the space of four hours, less than it would take to walk it in daylight. There they carried out a robbery. The supernatural goat-thing brought them all back to Sittard “in no time” early next morning.

Reiner Sijban, detained in a Dutch prison, recalled flying from Klimmen to Maastricht with two other men on the back of a flying *bok* one night in 1774. There they



GOAT FLIGHTS SEEM TO HAVE SHAVED AT LEAST AN HOUR OFF USUAL TRAVEL TIMES

found “a number of perpetrators” who'd also arrived on goats. They all carried out a burglary, then flew back to Klimmen.

Arnold Gielen, held in an Austrian prison in Wellen in the same year, told how following a meeting on the heath outside Abswellen, there appeared “nine or ten beasts in the form of a billy goat, slightly bigger and longer.” Gielen's “captain” assembled the men to “fly over the treetops” on goats to rob a tenant farm on the other

side of Maastricht, leaving their goats “standing there” before returning to their Abswellen assembly point within two hours (a four-hour walk in daylight). A cross-border goat flight from Abswellen to Meerssen in the Dutch Republic featured in testimony by Peter Willem Stassen. He recalled being in a group of about 30 gang members, each “sitting on a billy goat the greatness of a horse”.

Some “eight or nine hundred people,” including “three or four parties from Wellen,” made a cross-border billy goat flight in 1770 from a point on the Meuse between Liege and Maastricht, according to Mattijs Goffins, “with three or four men on a billy goat”. The flight took in the Linen Tree Inn along the river, the town of Tongeren and a castle where “hundreds” stood on guard while *bokkenrijders* climbed in through a window. Another account by a *bokkenrijder* named Gerits had the Devil himself transport “accomplices” from Our White Lady convent outside Maastricht into the town. The Devil, summoned by chanting the *bokkenrijder* oath, appeared “in the shape of a great billy goat with horns and the rear of a horse”. In other testimony, the Devil appeared as *several* large billy goats to transport *bokkenrijders* to robberies.

UNGODLY OATHS

“I forswear God and pledge myself to the Devil!” That was the *bokkenrijder's* oath. Both Dutch and Austrian authorities regarded such oaths as a threat to the social and spiritual order – it was these “ungodly oaths” that earned many *bokkenrijders* the death penalty.

Gang members were inducted in blasphemous oath ceremonies, often ending with tips – coins being pressed into their

hands. Ledgers with membership lists were produced, some showing members' military "ranks". Ceremonies featured stolen holy wafers – participants spat these out – a green drink that "drove men mad" (probably absinthe) and a red-coloured, bitter oil sprinkled on food. Sometimes they held their ceremonies in chapels, with participants crawling in on their hands and knees, sometimes oaths were administered in the woods. Sometimes a drawing of the Devil or a goat's head was displayed, or a dried pickled "hand of glory" was on show. Arnoldus Zander testified to being at an inn in Hertogenrath where alleged *bokkenrijder* Joseph Kerckshoff was administering oaths and had with him a "death's head" – a severed human head.

The oaths included terrible punishments for those who betrayed their comrades. One read: "So the Devil break my neck." Some *bokkenrijders* described having to take the oath several times over. In some accounts, a hooded figure said to be the Devil, or at least to represent him, walked among the congregation. Once a year, *bokkenrijders* were said to visit their master, the Devil, on the "Mookerheide", a wasteland near the River Waal, north of Overmaas. Such details suspiciously resemble those in dodgy 15th-century witchfinder's manual the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

Joseph Kerckhoffs, a former officer in the Austrian army and the respectable town surgeon of Hertogenrade, was fingered as the leader of the *bokkenrijders*. But multiple testimonies described a supreme *bokkenrijder* commander, above Kerckhoffs, for both the Dutch and the Austrian Netherlands. There were sightings of a tall, fat man of military bearing, wearing a fine pale blue officer's tailcoat with silver trim and a hat to match. He spoke High German and French, and was seen giving orders over a 15-year period up to 1775. He was named as Baron Joachim Reihold van Glasenapp. It is believed he died of natural causes.

PROSECUTIONS

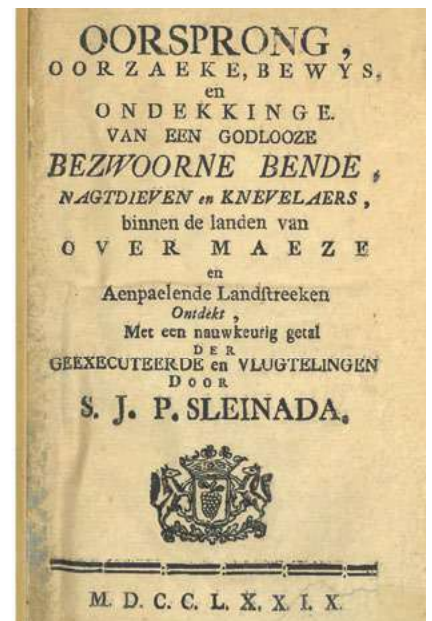
This "robbery in the Devil's name" brought surprisingly little loot to individual *bokkenrijders*. Mattijs Goffins testified that an almost 1,000-strong raid at a castle netted a total of only 20 shillings, while other bemused *bokkenrijders* said they earned as much in their "tips" after oaths as they did in shares of booty. Some *bokkenrijder* captains seemed overly keen on recruitment – court testimony regularly stated that ridiculously large gangs – 100 or 200-strong – turned up to (unspecified) robberies to "stand watch". Willem de Kamp stated of one 1756 robbery he took part in that "the portion was not great because the band was so strong" in numbers.

Jabobus Offermans claimed he had "heard say" that there was a plan "to make themselves masters of town and city and to ravage everything." In March 1770, the City Council of Maastricht got wind of a vague conspiracy by some 500 persons who threat-



ABOVE: The *bokkenrijders* have been a staple of novels and dramas such as "The Bokkenrijder, or The Skeleton", a 1917 play by Dutch writer Frederik van Eeden. BELOW: "The Legend of the Bokkenrijders" was a 13-part Dutch television series from 1994.





ABOVE LEFT: A mass execution of the “great robber band”. ABOVE RIGHT: The earliest written account of the *bokkenrijders* was published by Dutch priest JSP Sleinada in 1790. BELOW: An illustration from the first novel on the subject, *The Bokkenrijders in the Land of Valkenberg* by Pieter Ecrivisse, 1845.

ened the lives of the city government’s officials. They took this seriously enough to post a reward of 100 gold ducats for the “discovery of conspirators”, assumed to be *bokkenrijders*.

It’s likely that these accounts of *bokkenrijder* numbers, along with their billy goat flights and their ungodly oaths, were exaggerated or obtained under torture. The three biggest waves of *bokkenrijder* prosecution came in 1743-1775 (with an estimated 200 people tried), 1750-1751 (35 people tried) and 1771-1777 (400 tried). Some were on trial for crimes committed 12 years earlier.

In Dutch Limburg, the aldermen’s courts tried *bokkenrijders* in “extra-ordinaire” trials. Prosecutions included a “first interrogation” within 24 hours of arrest. Then followed the *streng verhoor*, the “strict interrogation” under torture, always in the presence of two magistrates, a secretary and a surgeon. Supposed *bokkenrijder* “general” Joseph Kerckhoffs was tortured for months, including one torture session *after* he’d been sentenced to death. But he never confessed to anything, telling judges: “Gentlemen, you can tear my body to pieces, but I have nothing to say.”

During prosecutions, courts would usually order the suspect’s property confiscated to pay for the costs of the trial. In 1773, The States General in The Hague, while vigorously pursuing *bokkenrijder* gangs within the Dutch Republic, expressed alarm at the expense of prosecutions. States General resolutions from this period request detailed breakdowns of the cost of prosecutions, remuneration for the executioners, secretaries and surgeons, how much was paid to informers, bills from carpenters who built gallows and so on. The States General imposed fixed fees for officers of the court



HE TOLD JUDGES: “YOU CAN TEAR MY BODY TO PIECES, BUT I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY”

trying and sentencing *bokkenrijders* and established systems for the speedy liquidation of their confiscated property.

Particularly in the Austrian Empire, *bokkenrijders* and thieves generally were executed on “the breaking wheel” or the “Catherine Wheel”. They were tied down in a prone position while the rim of a heavy cartwheel was dropped onto them, starting

with their legs and working their way up; dropping the wheel on their chest was usually enough to kill them outright. Hanging or garrotting was more common under Dutch jurisdiction. On one busy day for the executioner in the Dutch town of Heerlen, seven convicted *bokkenrijders* were hanged.

The first written account of the *bokkenrijders* was *Causes, Proof and Discovery of an Ungodly, Sworn Band of Night Thieves and Assailants within the Lands of Overmaas and Adjacent Regions*, written in 1790 by “Sleinada”, an anagram of “A Daniels”, a Dutch priest who knew some of the *bokkenrijders* personally. Daniels wrote of the *bokkenrijders*’ pacts with the Devil, and how “the common people” told stories of their nocturnal billy goat flights. His book includes a spell used to achieve goat flights – “Over houses, over gardens, over stakes, even to Cologne and into the wine cellar!”³

The *bokkenrijders* may have been an exaggeration or invention to cover up the weakness of the authorities of the Dutch Republic and the Austrian Netherlands and their inability to deal with what was probably just lots of small gangs operating at the same time, mostly with impunity.

Records of *bokkenrijder* prosecutions are less frequent from the late 1780s onwards. 1789 saw a brief uprising in the Austrian Netherlands. A subsequent military campaign against revolutionary France ended badly for the Austrian Empire, with the Austrian Netherlands annexed to the Republic of France in 1795. The Dutch Republic became the pro-French Batavian Republic in the same year. Maastricht and environs was ceded to France, with all of the Netherlands eventually annexed to Napoleon’s empire in 1811. The *bokkenrijders* disappeared while new international criminal networks emerged, operating across the



ABOVE: There are many statues and public artworks commemorating the bokkenrijders in Limburg. From left to right: The Halderpark, Valkenburg; the marketplace, Schaesberg; the marketplace, Maaseik. **BELOW:** Visitors to Musea Maseik's 2021 exhibition "Like Thieves in the Night? Bokkenrijders in the Maasland".

Netherlands and into Germany, benefitting from the upheaval of regime change. The haphazard feudal courts were abolished and their revolutionary successors had no room for superstitious conspiracy theories. The Kingdom of the United Netherlands that emerged in 1814 after Napoleon's fall retained its secular courts. These were no longer inclined to hear testimony of suspects flying through the air on goats.

Having an ancestor who was tried as a *bokkenrijder* is now a badge of honour in both Dutch and Belgian Limburg. Today they have a reputation as Robin Hood-type anti-authority figures, celebrated in monuments and guided walks. There is a Bokkenrijders Festival in the Dutch town of Klimmen every August, and a Bokkenrijders Week every October in Valkenburg. Some municipalities in Belgian-Limburg mark 11 May – the day Joseph Kerckhoffs was sentenced to death – as International Bokkenrijders Day.

NOTES

1 "Derselven chirurgien (Kerckhoffs) ordner hadde gegeven ingevall van resistentie alles doot te scheiten of te slaan." Rijksarchief Limburg Maastricht LVO inv.no 8172, quoted in *De Bokkenrijders in Nederlands and Belgisch Limburg 1726-1794*, Tom Oversteegen, eigenboekuitgeven 2014.

2 <https://twitter.com/MaeneSigne/status/1542064716197122051>

3 "Over huis, over tuin, over staak, en dat tot Keulen in de wijnkelder!"

FURTHER READING IN ENGLISH

Jacobus van der Schlossen: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kobus_van_der_Schlossen

Zwartmakers gang: <https://dutch-folklore.fandom.com/wiki/Zwartmakers>

Joseph Kerckhoffs of Herzogenade (video): <https://youtu.be/He2xxirixJU>

The Buck Riders' Fellowship: www.bokkenrijders.com/english-site



Project Bokkenrijders (www.twitter.com/P_Bokkenrijders) have an English-language podcast series (<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5aBRQw8vPATKkhCnupqGF?si=5a25cb18d2b94873&nd=1>). They have an online transcription of Sleynada's Causes, Proof and Discovery into modern Dutch, with an online English translation appearing soon. Thanks to Project Bokkenrijders for suggested translations of *bokkenrijder* terminology for this article.

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FANTASY ISLAND

101 years on from the birth of Sir (x5) Eric Gairy, the grasping, UFO-crazy first Prime Minister of Grenada, **SD TUCKER** recalls an isle filled with alien corpses, obeah magic and murderous Mongooses...

There is a persistent rumour that following the US-led invasion of the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada in October 1983 to depose a newly installed military junta, concerned viewers rang up the Manchester-based TV company Granada in their droves to check none of their favourite soap-opera characters from *Coronation Street* had been killed or injured during the offensive.¹ Ken and Deirdre Barlow may have survived unscathed, but Grenada itself was less fortunate, having been ruled since autonomy from Britain in 1974 by a series of crooks and autocrats whose grip on reality was sometimes every bit as loose as that of those who feared the consequences of a successful cruise-missile attack on the Rovers Return.

Grenada's most flamboyant political actor was Sir Eric Gairy (1922-97), the nation's first post-colonial PM, knighted by the Queen in 1977 for alleged services to his nation (although, uniquely, he claimed to actually have been knighted by Her Majesty on no fewer than five separate occasions, so that should really be Sir Sir Sir Sir Sir Eric Gairy). Another honour bestowed upon Gairy – by himself this time – was to appear upon one of his nation's \$2 postage stamps, issued in 1978, where his disembodied head floated next to the UN General Assembly Building in New York above the apostrophe-abusing caption "RESEARCH INTO U.F.O.'s". A special presentation-mount featured a larger surrounding image of a flying saucer hovering above Manhattan's skyscrapers, monitoring Gairy's lifelong "QUEST TO DISCOVER MORE ABOUT U.F.O.'s AND RELATED PHENOMENA". Other stamps in the series (see **FT225:48-53**) depicted famous UFOs from history, such as a classic 1950s Adamski Scoutship.² If Sir Eric is known outside of Grenada for anything today, it is for tirelessly speechifying about UFOs to the UN – which is fortunate for his posthumous reputation, as posterity might otherwise have remembered him as an incompetent tin-pot chancer.

RED SKY IN THE MORNING...

Born into the poor black Catholic peasant-classes in 1922, Gairy toiled in the regional oil industry before returning to Grenada in 1949 to found the colony's first trade union. In 1951, he called a general strike and proved himself a truly fiery orator – his men set fire to so many buildings that the period became known as the 'Red Sky' days.



LEFT: Sir Eric Gairy at Buckingham Palace in 1977 to receive his knighthood.

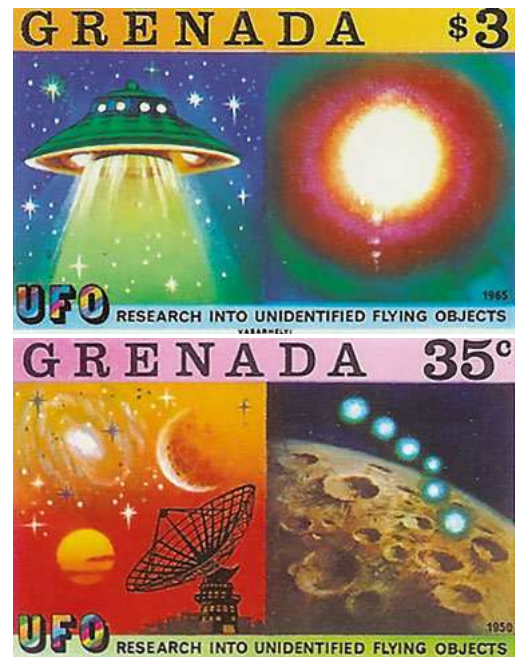
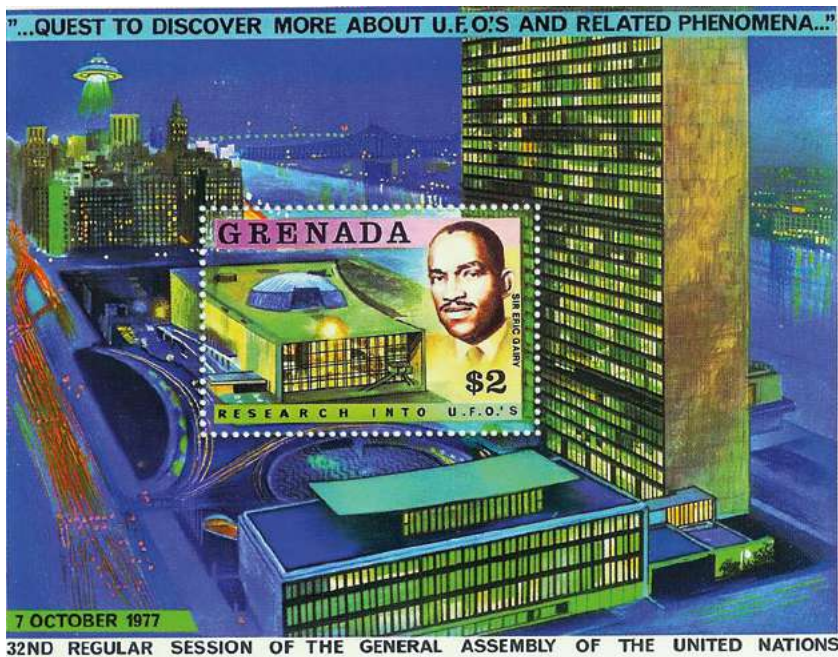
"WHO DO THEY THINK HAD THE DANCING HORSES FLOWN IN?"

Gairy was imprisoned, which only aided his folk hero status among the downtrodden black underclass, and soon freed to avert further rebellion. In 1950, Gairy proved his skill at coining memorable acronyms by founding the Grenada United Labour Party (GULP), at a time when Britain wanted rid of its Caribbean possessions. By 1961, he had risen to be Chief Minister, under British supervision, but was removed from office in 1962 for misuse of public funds, much to his chagrin; as he complained, all he did was use taxpayers' cash to buy himself a large piano and redecorate his residence. Later, he would be dressing in white lounge-suits and accumulating a large collection of Cadillacs, and the 'Squandermania' scandal didn't appear to do 'Uncle Gairy' much harm, with many Grenadians viewing it as one in the eye for their old white 'plantocracy' overlords, whose farmlands he sent thugs to menace, Bob Mugabe-style.³ Gairy's private militia were known as the 'Mongoose Gang' and aped the similar *tonton macoute* of Papa Doc Duvalier over in Haiti (see **FT336:52-54**), breaking up anti-Gairy meetings by driving

cars into them, or beating up and murdering critics of the regime with rifles and planks. Yet Gairy denied his men were a militia at all, "just some unruly young fellows from my union" who were "always fighting in the rum shops" until he "got them jobs in a World Health Organisation mongoose eradication project" to put them on the straight and narrow; their weapons were for killing vermin, not people.

All rumours to the contrary, he claimed, were the result of lies from other regional politicians, who shared a "simple jealousy" of his status as "the pro in politics of the whole Caribbean area", a man with "31 honours on my shoulder, and I don't mean all the little stuff". As a staunch anti-Communist ally in a region rife with leftists, Eric was so liked by the Americans that they "even gave me 200 used tennis rackets for the kids" – instead of, say, some actual aid money – "that special rapport went on right through until 1979."

Post-independence, 'Dr' Gairy, as he now styled himself, built a dodgy property empire of hotels and nightclubs, where those seeking favours could slip him bribes under the table. In a fantastically immodest 1984 interview, a now-deposed Gairy boasted of how rival statesmen "had people who came here from Europe in 1976 to study the sources of my popularity with women. They watched me dancing, they studied all the things I did." In 1970, Lover Boy was invited to be a judge at Miss World in London, a contest won for the first time by a black woman – Miss Grenada, no less; a fact totally unrelated to rumours that the event's organiser hoped to acquire property on Gairy's island on the cheap. Protests arose that Miss Sweden had actually won, but these slanderous claims came from opponents who were "all mad" because "when I go to their countries, I get a bigger welcome than the local leaders. That's my own charisma. I can't stop that." The charismatic Gairy did indeed win six out of the seven elections he contested from 1954-1976, at least after fixing some of them, but once he returned to Grenada from exile following the 1983 US invasion, he failed to regain office – but only because the new elections were faked. "Special ballots were brought in from Georgia," Gairy explained.



ABOVE: Gairy's appearance on a \$2 Grenada stamp along with the UN building where he frequently shared his obsession with UFOs, plus two other ufological issues.

They were "already marked with special chemicals" which stopped real voters' crosses showing up next to his name, and a series of initially invisible crosses, "all identical and obviously machine-made", later appeared next to the names of his rivals. Or maybe voters just didn't want to re-elect a man who spent more time lecturing the UN about UFOs than governing the country properly. Gairy disputed this, saying he wouldn't have got five knighthoods if he spent *all* his time on UFOs, it was just a hobby of his, like collecting pianos. "Do they think I'm a clown?" he raged. "They forget all the other things I did. Who else did so much for Grenada? Who do they think it was had all the dancing horses flown in from Guyana?"⁴

GRENADA REPORTS

In his earliest UN speech in 1974, Gairy boasted how a newly-free Grenada finally had its own voice and promised to promote "universal peace" in the name of God, under whose eternal laws his "Isle of Spice" was now governed. He asked "the Cosmic Father" to bless all men "on this Earth-plane", while also anticipating the day when NASA put "a woman technologist" into outer space, "for if man is to dwell one day on the Moon or on any other planets, he cannot do that successfully without woman." Revealing psychic powers, he declared: "I sense the spirit of every Grenadian citizen and friend harmonising with me at this very moment in giving praise to the great God, the Supreme Architect of the Universe." Every October from 1975 to 1978, Gairy gave a variation of the same basic spiel, advising the UN set up its own parapsychology and UFO agencies to explore "various inexplicable phenomena

which continue to baffle even the most advanced branches of science" – like the Bermuda Triangle. When man walked on the Moon, a "New World Order based on peace and love" had been born, so man had to "unlock the door to himself" by refinding his lost psychic powers, of which he was now "afraid". Due to "modern gadgetry", humans had undergone spiritual "degeneration", losing their "natural endowments", like the ability to see in the dark or sense the presence of non-human entities, as dogs and horses – and Eric too – still could.

An "overwhelmed" Gairy had twice seen saucers over Grenada. While his island took "no categorical theoretical stand" on their nature, he clearly thought UFOs were nuts-and-bolts alien craft whose crews were "perhaps living among us as Earthlings" in disguise. He asked the UN to establish "a communications system" via which sightings could be "rapidly exchanged internationally" and fed back UN-wards. The first step, though, should be to study the paranormal, as then humanity's soul would "make a thrust beyond Earth's orbit", allowing us to "more easily appreciate [the reality of] extraterrestrial existence." By revealing man's "esoteric and inner self", the UN could render him "the complete master of self and circumstances, and not the subject, in some cases the slave, thereof". He hoped God would "refill" delegates' minds with his "divine, cosmic and universal spirit" to "revitalise" them into signing off on Gairy's plan, which was "obligatory". To this end, he urged the UN to establish an official definition of what God actually was, as the Deity's current monikers – "Allah, Yahweh, Jah, Krishna, Shinto or any other

name" – were all just competing labels for the same Divine Being. Different cultures had sadly "given Him nationalities and colours", driving them apart, not knowing that actually "God has no shape". Those like Gairy who had enjoyed "perhaps a split second of ecstatic experience" within our "world of illusion" knew God's presence had no limits. "God is everywhere", even on Mars: "The God we worship is certainly the God who is present in outer space, on the Moon and other planets, for He is the God of the universe – the God of galaxies of worlds." Proving the reality of the Cosmic Deity we shared with UFO pilots would help the Cold War-era UN achieve "a lasting world peace", as "God Himself is that universal order that holds and binds all things together". Gairy's speeches, he claimed, were "motivated by divine inspiration", so to ignore them would be foolish – but ignored they were. In 1977, Eric lamented that, while the UN "politely took notice of my concerns... in fact, no action flowed." Claiming "a mandate to clarify inexplicable events", Gairy now met fellow UFO-witness President Jimmy Carter in the White House, unsuccessfully suggesting Carter make UN diplomats study saucers and "arrive at a common concept of God". Still, the media were "agog" at his words and he had been "literally inundated" with letters of "tremendous interest" from ufologists worldwide.⁵

One such pen-pal was US journalist Lee Spiegel, creator of 1975 CBS spoken-word documentary album *UFOs: The Credibility Factor*, which he sent to Grenada's UN ambassador. Gairy then invited Spiegel to UN HQ in New York, where he was given legal diplomatic accreditation, spending



1978 preparing a UFO talk for UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim in July, followed by a fuller one made to a UN Special Political Committee that November. Top ufologists and astronomers Jacques Vallee, J Allen Hynek, Claude Poher and Leonard Stringfield, together with noted UFO witnesses like astronaut Gordon Cooper, spoke at length about the need for UN involvement of some kind, while Steven Spielberg, fresh from directing *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, helped out with audio-visual aspects. In a public letter, NASA's Cooper warned how aliens would not accept humans as "fully qualified universal team-members" until we showed them that "we have learned to resolve our problems by peaceful means, rather than warfare" – evidently he had never heard of the Sontarans. Although Cooper had "not yet had the privilege of flying a UFO", he felt confident they were tools of world peace, meaning the UN had "a vested interest" in taking them seriously.⁶

Sadly, on 12 October, Gairy himself gave another UN speech rather sabotaging this aim. He began by condemning his political opponents as terrorists, explaining how "human rights must not be regarded as a one-way street" when dealing with such scum. Death was "indeed a very necessary and inescapable phenomenon" and "man's body simply a garment of flesh, a material robe, a vehicle by which man operates within Earth's vibrations" he said, ostensibly in sympathy with recently deceased world-statesmen, but perhaps by way of a warning. And what about the non-human rights of non-human people, like "the animals of the forest, the pets at home, the mammals, the birds, the fishes, the reptiles, the huge forest trees soaring high in splendour and elegance, and the sheltering shrubs"? Some flora and fauna were simply "more responsible", "more impressive" and more capable of love than some human beings. "It is no fault of theirs we cannot understand them or in a general way communicate with them and that they cannot represent themselves within this noble organisation," Gairy added – but, given UN support, one day mankind might evolve to talk telepathically with flowers, many of whom reacted "spontaneously" with grief to the death of their owners, sometimes "even before the event took place". Imagine if plants abused us as we do them, "peeling the skins off our backs as we peel the bark from trees" – humans had become barbarous, tree-raping creatures, most of whom could no longer perceive flowers' psychic auras as Gairy could. UFOs were here to help us bloom like begonias and "save man from self-destruction". Man thought himself "the greatest creation on God's Earth", but ETs could show us that God had created life on other planets too, teaching us humility. Surely the time was "ripe" for the UN to not only study UFOs, but also create "a universal

language" to bring all living beings together. Then, like Mrs Thatcher, Eric concluded by citing St Francis of Assisi: "Where there is hatred, let me sow love... where there is despair, hope."⁷ He seems to have got his antonyms the wrong way around here.

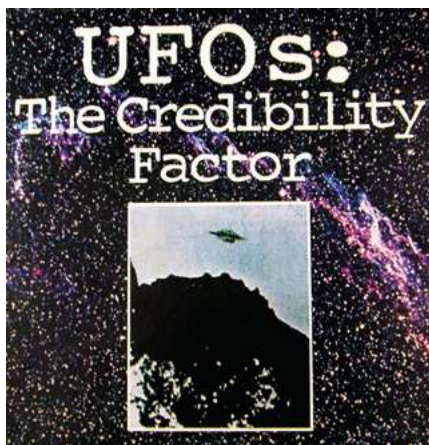
U EFF OFF

Finally, in 1977 and 1978, the UN issued a pair of directives (32/424 and 33/426) that said, parsing the diplomatic Newspeak, "We note Mr Gairy keeps going on about this, and if any nations do want to swap any UFO data, please go ahead; we don't care."⁸ In March 1979, Gairy was in New York again to discuss 33/426 with Kurt Waldheim when rumours spread that in his convenient, blame-absolving absence the Mongoose Gang would be loosed to kill his latest foes in the Marxist New JEWEL (Joint Endeavour for Welfare, Education and Liberation) Movement, causing the NJM to launch a pre-emptive coup. Gairy sought Anglo-US military aid to remove "a small group of Communists", but within six hours the revolution was complete, most of Eric's army being asleep at the time. Barbadian calypso-act The Draytons Two's 1973 protest song *G-O, GO!* had featured the following, now-prophetic, lyrics: "G-O, GO! Gairy must go! JEWEL come, Gairy go, Gairy go with UFO!" Which, in a sense, he did, remaining in exile in the US, attending UFO clubs and ranting on the radio, until the invasion of 1983. For Eric, his was a triumphant return: "Thousands lined the streets. They wept, they threw flowers, they just wanted to touch me." Yet in his absence, all his businesses had been stolen, with even his house now occupied by a gang of Rastafarians, whom he proved unable to evict ("I told them 'OK, just take care of it.'"). Although Gairy did not personally stand in the ensuing 1984 election, his Party still won 39 per cent of the vote, but only one seat. For the 1990 ballot, Gairy apparently pretended to be going blind while "expecting a miracle"

to restore his sight, thus proving he was God's chosen ruler. But still he lost, doing so again in 1995. He blamed enemies for libelling him as a Devil-worshipping UFO-nut, when in fact, "I am a Roman Catholic and a member of the Rosicrucian Society", an innocent "mystic" who "wouldn't kill a moth".⁹

But Gairy made it easy for his rivals to present himself as a sorcerer. "He who opposes me, opposes God," he said, once gathering a large crowd to watch him jump off a boat and walk on water like Jesus (he backed out at the last moment, saying "The time is not yet right"). "I don't believe in violence," he later added. "I'm a spiritual man. I am in the mystical world... My opponents can't beat me. They are based on negativity. I am positivity. When they hate, I love. I send out waves of love to them. I pray for them... I laugh, I play tennis. I do yoga... God has a divine plan for Grenada... Nobody can stop it... And I have been appointed to carry out this divine plan." It thus logically followed that it was his adversaries who were Satanic. Grenada's sister isle of Carriacou suffered a drought in 1972, which, Gairy wrote, came "like a *Blaize* of fire" to destroy crops – Herbert Blaize being his main competitor. Declaring a Day of Prayer to bring rain, Gairy alleged Blaize's GNP Party, "who represent the Devil and his followers", had donated Carriacou a free tractor; but only for the use of GNP-voting farmers, leading to the climate "calamity" as "some form of punishment" from Above. In return, rivals dubbed Gairy 'Lucifer', with his GNP foe (later turncoat ally) Wellington Friday saying Gairy had only persuaded Britain to depart Grenada through witchcraft: he claimed a written spell to an obeah deity had blown into his London hotel room on a gust of magic wind during the self-rule talks.

Obeah is a voodoo-like West Indian slave faith of African origin, which the often middle class, mixed race JEWEL and GNP politicians used to smear Gairy as a superstitious, orgy-going primitive who sacrificed goats to win elections or trained bees to bite enemies and send them blind; but his working-class black support-base tended to believe in obeah, weakening this strategy. When a tractor overturned while clearing a landslide that non-GULP workers had refused to shift, the idea Gairy had done this via obeah may have seemed impressive, neither laughable nor evil. Yet, after the 1979 coup, JEWEL used local media to expose "GAIRY'S WITCHCRAFT ROOM" in his official residence of Mount Royal, where ritualistic items like donkeys' eyes, bags of white powder, candles, crucifixes, incense sticks, statues of saints, a bishop's staff, a crown, a wooden sword, a human skeleton, blood and coloured robes decorated with sea-shells and carved bones were supposedly found, together with multiple Bibles and a list of enemies, whom it was implied he sought

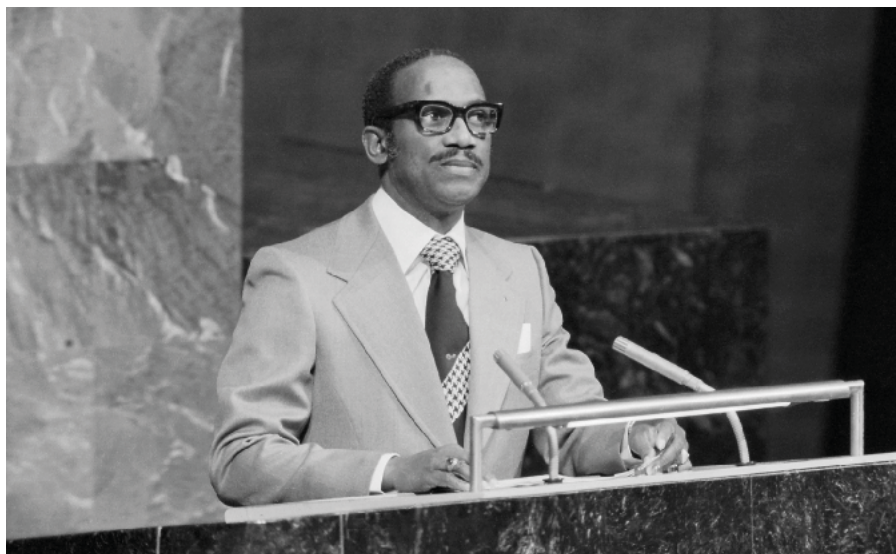


ABOVE: Lee Spiegel's 1975 spoken word album landed him an invite to attend the UN with PM Gairy.

to curse to death. He also had a large library of “bad books” which “suggested witchcraft” – in reality just mass-market titles about the paranormal. JEWEL-friendly media were most taken by a text from California UFO-cult the Aetherius Society (see **FTFT104:49, 270:38, 271:51-53, 388:77**), recounting astral chats with “The Master Jesus” in outer space. It may sound odd, but obeah is syncretic, not Satanic, a believer’s personal, mix-and-match rituals, often basically self-invented and including Catholic elements; as Gairy said, “different people call different things by different names.” A mixed-race Marxist’s witchcraft was a black slave-descendant’s traditional worship.¹⁰

Dying in 1997 and given a State funeral, in 2008 Gairy was officially honoured as a National Hero – he did achieve independence, wicked warlock or not. But for some, Gairy’s sad end was linked more to aliens than demons. According to ufologist Wesley H Bateman, Gairy was once given a psychic message from space saying the two really must meet. Purportedly, Wesley had spent 30-plus years working as an accredited “Federation Telepath”, pushing his mind through the cosmic “Frequency Barrier” to receive messages from such alien beings as Tixer-Chock of Gracyea, Serbatin of Gee, Tillabret of Emarin, Rendowan of Nodia, Petrimmor of Cartress and Ombota of Mars. In the 1960s, Bateman had passed their infinite knowledge to scriptwriter Gene Rodenberry, who stole it all for his *Star Trek* TV series. Gairy wanted Bateman to ask the Klingons et al why they were circling Grenada, and what he should do if they landed there – or, more accurately, if they landed there again.

One night, Gairy said, he was in one of his nightclubs soliciting bribes, when a poor fisherman reported having netted “a giant human body”, eight feet tall. Gairy sent troops to retrieve the Nordic-type corpse, which had white, braided hair and six fingers on each hand, and was clad in a dark blue diving suit of material so elastic you could pull it out two feet before it pinged back into place. Gairy’s men also recovered wreckage from a saucer crash and containers filled with specimens of local sea-life, the dead humanoid then being sent off to the nearby St George’s Medical School for autopsy. Gairy confessed his true reason for meeting Kurt Waldheim at the UN in 1979 was to inform him of all this – but then he was removed in JEWEL’s coup, which was actually a ruse to silence him. Worse, one of the reasons given for the later US invasion was to protect medical students at St George’s from Marxists by seizing its campus; were soldiers just stealing the alien body? The 1983 assault caused Cold War tension, but in 1985 Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev met in Geneva, jokingly agreeing that, in event of any Martian attack, the US and USSR



BETTMANN / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Gairy delivering an address to the UN General Assembly on the subject of UFOs.

would unite against the enemy space fleet. But what if they weren’t joking, this being a sincere response to the recovery of Gairy’s ET corpse from Grenadian shores, as some now maintain?¹¹ Perhaps the great *Coronation Street* invasion panic of 1983 was no urban myth after all – as Sir Eric Gairy’s dramatic career shows, some people clearly have trouble distinguishing fiction from reality when it comes to such long-running soap operas.

NOTES

1 A story promulgated, for instance, in Rod Liddle’s column in the *Sunday Times* for 4 July 2021.

2 For full catalogue images of these stamps, see <http://golowess.stamps.com/reference/formatprinters/Grenada/grenadastamps.htm>

3 www.thegrenadarevolutiononline.com/gairya.html; www.independent.co.uk/news/people/people/obituary-sir-eric-gairy-1247273.html; <https://thegrenadainformer.com/news/item/1201-controversial-gairy>; <http://writing.danmalo.info/tag/mongoose-gang/>; www.caribbean-beat.com/issue-96/end-eric; <http://content.time.com/subscriber/article/0,33009,916730,00.html>; <http://netk.net.au/Whitton/Amazing38.asp>; www.icwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/FJM-12.pdf; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongoose_Gang

4 <https://nacla.org/article/american%27-man-talk-eric-gairy>; <https://rodriguezmatute.home.blog/2020/02/28/miss-world-1970/>

5 <http://undocs.org/en/A/PV.2233>; <http://undocs.org/en/A/PV.2378>; <http://undocs.org/en/A/31/PV.22>; <http://undocs.org/en/A/32/PV.25>; <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v23/d304>; www.bbc.co.uk/caribbean/news/story/2011/03/110314_ufo.shtml; www.ufoevidence.org/documents/doc1242.htm. In 1977, Gairy opened a major Mexican UFO conference, giving the keynote address. He hoped to hold future events in Grenada, turning the island into the global centre of international saucer-research. Gairy did genuinely follow the latest UFO news; in 1978, Australian UN delegates

were annoyed when Eric brought up the sensitive case of their Cessna pilot Frederick Valentich, who had disappeared – Gairy called it an “abduction” – while chasing a UFO over the Bass Strait on 21 October (see www.exopoliticsportugal.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/UN-UFOs-1978.pdf).

6 <http://leespiegel.com/index.php?ptp=un>; <http://leespiegel.com/index.php?ptp=bio>; www.huffpost.com/entry/spielberg-offered-to-aid-in-united-nations-ufo-effort_b_59c5a0afe4b0f2df5e83ae55

7 <http://undocs.org/en/A/33/PV.32>

8 www.ufoevidence.org/documents/doc1037.htm; www.ufoevidence.org/documents/doc902.htm; https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/655326/files/A_32_430-EN.pdf. Only three governments actually responded to these directives (India, Luxembourg and the Seychelles – and India’s response was that the idea should be abandoned). In 1992, Mohammad Ahmad Ramadan – “President of the United Nations Parapsychology Society”, which wasn’t really what it sounds like – requested the UN finally implement Gairy’s plans as detailed in Directive 33/426, but to no avail, even though he organised a lobbying conference in which the likes of Stanton Friedman, Linda Moulton-Howe and Dr Norma Milanovich – who had channelled cosmic messages through her computer specially for the occasion – requested UN-allied NGOs like the Red Cross and Greenpeace use their influence to make it so (see www.ufoevidence.org/documents/doc748.htm).

9 <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/02/23/world/exile-s-return-to-grenada-a-has-been-or-a-hero.html>; <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/25/world/ex-leader-is-seen-as-factor-in-grenada-vote.html>; https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/2F9781127066909_2

10 Diana Paton, *The Cultural Politics of Obeah*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp.293-298; <https://www.thegrenadarevolutiononline.com/gairya.htm>; <https://ufdc.ufl.edu>

11 www.info-quest.org/documents/grenadaufo.html; <https://www.banyen.com/contributors/wesley-h-bateman>; <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/reagan-and-gorbachev-agreed-pause-cold-war-case-alien-invasion-180957402/>

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The Devil strides our countryside

The English landscape is studded with many placenames and geographical features named after Old Nick, says **Ross MacFarlane**, and this book brilliantly explores their folk origins

Cloven Country

The Devil and the English Landscape

Jeremy Harte

Reaktion Books 2022

Hb, 296pp, £15.99, ISBN 9781789146509

One of the most beloved of *Doctor Who* stories has long been 1971's "The Daemons". Over the course of its five episodes, the Doctor battles against ancient forces, unleashed after being long buried beneath a seemingly sedate English rural village. To exemplify the apparent supernatural qualities of the storyline, the village and the Neolithic burial mound from which these dormant horrors emerge are named Devil's End and the Devil's Hump. These names were not acts of poetic licence on the part of the writers of "The Daemons"; as *Cloven Country* shows, the English landscape is studded with many a placename or geographical feature named after Old Nick.

Cloven Country's nine chapters are each formed around a different folk tale describing an encounter with the Devil, the ending of which often explains why the Devil's name is given to a specific location or aspect of the landscape (alas, Harte features no Devil's Ends but does feature the Devil's Humps near Chichester).

From each folk tale, Harte then pulls back to reveal how the story is not solely rooted to one area but has variations occurring across the English, and sometimes Welsh, countryside. For instance, England abounds with tales of the Devil interceding during the construction of churches by moving the building stones away from the agreed upon location – tales which were told to explain why often these

churches were in odd locations in their parish.

However, it quickly becomes apparent that what Harte is doing is not simply compiling a compendium of traditional folk tales. Although he will retell a tale with a nimble and gleeful charm, he'll then carefully examine them, showing the similarities between different versions and revealing the tropes and motifs that these variations share. For example, the number of Devil's Bridges and Devil's Ditches that – according to local folklore – owe their creation to the Devil being tricked into their construction.

Harte's skill as a writer makes this process seamless. It also renders what could be an academic and slightly dry exercise every bit as interesting as the narra-

The Devil is tricked more than trickster, bamboozled by old women and everyday country folk

unchanging, but stories that alter and shift in the telling, citing the realisation in academia in recent decades that "oral narrative develops and changes just like written literature".

As such, Harte shows how in these tales, the Devil was not an original feature but was often taking the place of a giant or fairy in an earlier version of the story. For instance, Stonehenge is explained in a tale recorded in 1740 as the Devil hurling stones; back in Geoffrey of Monmouth's time it's an Irish giant who threw them into place.

Harte explains that his focus is on the "written version of an oral tale", and his task is to track the changes to a story from its first written-down version and working forward from there. His method is thus the opposite of many of the pioneer folklorists of the late 19th century, obsessed as they were with tracing the "origin version" of a folktale. (On which note, he is also quick to point out that English folktales of the Devil are not traces of lost Pagan religions.)

For Harte, the forward-facing, passing on of folklore is what is important. In his words, "Adoption, not parentage, is the real test of folklore..."

Cloven Country offers the Devil as more often tricked than trickster, bamboozled by old women and everyday country folk. He often seems to lack understanding of the natural world and agricultural practice: in a popular

story, told in many counties, the Devil goes into partnership with a local farmer, but he loses out to the man because he does not know how potatoes and wheat grow. Even with Harte's evidence that the Devil is being added into already-existing tales, it speaks to a sense of the figure as someone to be mocked rather than feared.

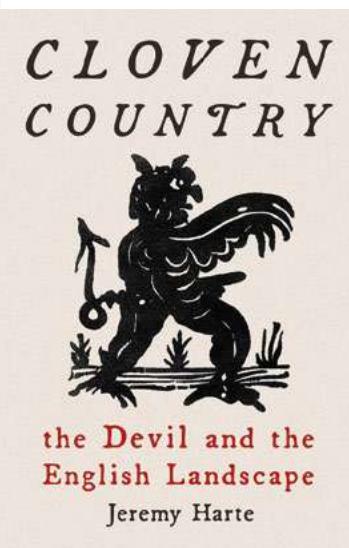
There's evidence of changing religious beliefs here, but also a hint of class tensions: as the author notes, often the Devil seems to represent feelings towards local landowners.

Cloven Country is testament to Harte's deep personal and learned knowledge of the folklore of England. He's seemingly read everything and been everywhere – and given the book is illustrated from his collection, clearly also bought the postcard. His writing style is wry and frequently aphoristic: for instance, "an 'authentic' folk tale is simply one where we haven't found out who made it up in the first place".

A regular contributor to the pages of FT, Harte is one of Britain's most eminent folklorists, whose previous works have included detailed accounts of gypsy folklore, holy wells and an award-winning book on fairy traditions. Despite his prominence in folklore circles, wider awareness of his work has been hampered by it often appearing in small presses where it has fallen out of print, or in academic journals hidden behind paywalls. As *Cloven Country* is coming from a more recognised publisher, hopefully his work will now reach a wider audience.

Purely on the basis of this erudite, witty and exceptionally entertaining book, it clearly deserves to.

★★★★★



tives themselves. Come for the telling of folktales; stay for the workings of folklore.

For Harte, the key to understanding folklore is the process of transmission. He shows legend and tradition not to be static and

Hallucinatory prisons

Interpreting the impossible geometries of an 18th-century artistic genius

Piranesi and the Modern Age

Victor Plahte Tschudi

MIT Press 2022

Hb, 288pp, £40, ISBN 9780262047173

Piranesi

The Complete Etchings

Luigi Ficacci

Taschen 2022

Hb, 788pp, £60, ISBN 9783836587617

If, centuries apart, Dürer and Escher had a lovechild, it would be, mid-way between them, Piranesi. The sheer detail and complexity of Dürer's engravings and the marvellous paradoxes of Escher's ever-climbing staircases both find echoes in Piranesi.

Architect and archaeologist Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778) is best known for his imaginary prisons, the *Carceri*, "a maze of subterranean vaults and gangways", says Victor Plahte Tschudi.

Piranesi and the Modern Age "charts the complex appropriation of Piranesi" in literature, photography, art, film, architecture and urbanism in the 20th century. Piranesi's work is all about "the blurring of distinctions between the inner and outer worlds, and the disorientation that results from that blurring". His art is hugely open to creative misinterpretation; the narratives stemming from his work are constantly invented, says Tschudi.

In his *Confessions of an Opium Eater* Thomas De Quincey described the etchings having never actually seen them, based solely on his faulty recollection of a conversation with Coleridge –

from which "Piranesi emerged as the architect of an entirely new conceptual landscape that spanned hallucinations, dreams and memories". It's the wonderfully complex conceptual landscape of Susannah Clarke's remarkable novel *Piranesi* [see FT400:63], very different from Piranesi's actual imaginary prison images, that I hold in my mind just as clearly as the etchings themselves. As Tschudi says, the reality of the etchings almost becomes superfluous; the constant reinterpretation "has turned Piranesi and his art into a narration of our deepest fantasies, fears and urges".

The Complete Etchings is a massive work, large format and 788 pages; it weighs a ton. It's astonishing that Taschen can produce the book at such a price.



And it is complete, with amazingly detailed etchings of classical Rome – buildings, arches, pillars, tombs. Piranesi moved to Rome at the age of 20, and remained there for the rest of his life.

He did two quite different sets of etchings of his famous *Carceri*, about 12

years apart; both are included, in most cases on facing pages. The second set are much darker and not always as clear – but in many cases they are more nightmarish and threatening, with more staircases to nowhere – impossible geometries. Again there is confusion, ambiguity: somehow we conflate the clarity of the first set with the more disturbing images of the second.

Piranesi's designs, especially his imaginary prisons, are wonderfully forlorn, both in themselves and in the way they have been endlessly reinterpreted.

David V Barrett

Tschudi ★★★★★

Ficacci ★★★★★

Mudlark'd

Hidden Histories from the River Thames

Malcolm Russell

Thames & Hudson 2022

Hb, 224pp, £25, ISBN 9780500024225

An outstanding book from several points of view: a handsome, well-crafted artefact, intelligently designed, printed on tight-weave matte paper rather than tacky gloss paper, written with skilful research and imagination, and garnished with evocative foreshore photographs by Matthew Williams-Ellis.

As the 19th-century MP John Burns put it: "The Thames is liquid history". The soft cushioning of an anaerobic mud has preserved Roman leather boot soles and delicate glass medicine vials. Each retrieved relic, seemingly humble or obscure, can be a portal to a forgotten world or way of life. Page-spreads of photographs of objects with data-dense captions are interspersed with erudite essays on Hanseatic merchants, Lascars (Indian seamen), counterfeiters, sex workers, pilgrims, cunning-folk, Fascists, Black Georgians, mountebanks, Macaronies, street musicians, cross-dressing women, heroes of the Crimea, gin drinkers, dentists, quacks and costermongers. There are useful tables to identify and date potsherds, bullets and beads. A high proportion of finds have been made by the author himself, an historian who began excavating Victorian household tips 35 years ago.

A spell fetish testifies to the survival of witchcraft belief. It consists of a plastic dinosaur toy pierced by a knitting needle and wrapped, together with several wooden blocks, in snakeskin and linen. A holy water stoup backplate was once a standard object in Catholic households. The stoup would be filled with consecrated water into which family members dipped their fingers to trace the sign of the cross as a blessing or to ward off evil. Protestant removal of such traditional supernatural assistance contributed to a heightened sense of vulnerability to bewitchment. A small medal inscribed "I survived Coronavirus 2020" shows some finds are bang up to date.

A bodkin, used for piercing cloth in lace-making, features, at one end, an ear scoop to gather

earwax for use on thread to keep the cut ends from unravelling. A 16th-century *memento mori* rosary bead has a face on one side and a skull on the other. A clothing stud featuring a copulating couple is captioned thus: "By the late 18th century, the turnover of London's sex industry was on a par with the value of goods handled by the city's docks. Sexual themes even made their way into fashion, being sported on buttons, cufflinks and clothing studs." Prehistoric tools, Roman coins and pilgrim badges often turn up, while clay pipes, of course, are found in abundance. Tobacco, brought back from the New World, was initially promoted in Spain as a treatment for a wide range of maladies (including kidney stones, tapeworms and toothache), but it was in England



that smoking for pleasure developed into a mainstream habit. The first recorded smoking incident

was in 1556, when a Bristol sailor caused a stir by blowing smoke from his nostrils in the street.

I highly recommend this book for anyone interested in our capital's history.

Paul Sieveking

★★★★★

The Lure of the Unknown

Essays on the Strange

Algernon Blackwood

Swan River Press 2023

Pb, 189pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781783807666

Shocks!

Algernon Blackwood

Eglantyne Press 2022

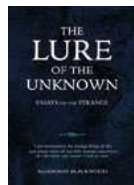
Pb, 291pp, £9.95, ISBN 9781913378042

Bounty for fans of Algernon Blackwood's evocative weird fictions, with two books that bring to light his later years as an unlikely celebrity of early BBC radio and TV in the 1940s, decades after his first collections of eerie tales.

The Lure of the Unknown, in a beautifully designed edition by Swan River Press, is the more reliable text. It is a collection of non-fiction pieces for newspapers and transcripts of BBC talks, some of which have never been published before. The editor,



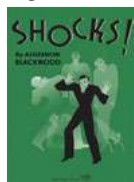
Blackwood's biographer Mike Ashley, has uncovered some fascinating essays, given that Blackwood was notoriously reticent about his inner spiritual life. He calls himself a seeker in one essay, and these short pieces track his path through a Plymouth Brethren childhood, séance tables and psychical research in the



1880s, ghost-hunting, ritual magic with WB Yeats, esoteric pursuits with George Russell, the higher mathematics, and his study of Eastern religions.

These late reflections also discuss his theory of the origins of his own creativity, echoing Jung's ideas of the collective unconscious, or the "subliminal uprush" of buried images and ideas proposed by the leading psychical researcher, FWH Myers. They provide a fascinating glimpse of Blackwood's ideas.

Shocks! is a reissue of Blackwood's last collection of tales in 1935. This Eglantyne Press edition reproduces the cover of the original first edition, but actually not its contents, which is frustrating. The editor has shuffled the contents, and added or removed tales without any editorial framing for these decisions. In the



main text, there are lots of scanning errors and intrusive editorial comments which are inserted into the main body of the stories, which is distracting.

These elements make the collection feel like a cheap print-on-demand reissue, except that there are some (unannounced) colour page inserts and at the end a reproduction and transcription of letters from the 1930s, one of which provides a description of one Mabel Bosworth meeting Blackwood in Florence, perhaps on a matter of psychical research.

The editor makes the case that Blackwood himself might have acted like his famous creation John Silence, the psychic detective. But this is tentative, and the collection feels like the wrong forum to push this idea. The stories are great, but buyer beware, this is not the original *Shocks!* collection.

Roger Luckhurst

Lure of the Unknown ★ ★ ★ ★
Shocks! ★ ★ ★

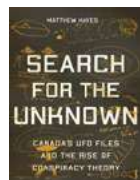
Search for the Unknown

Canada's UFO files and the Rise of Conspiracy Theory

Matthew Hayes

McGill-Queen's University Press 2022
Hb, 248pp, £24.99, ISBN 9780228010746

The Canadian UFO files include thousands of documents created by government agencies between 1950 and 1995: 4,500 sighting reports and more than 15,000 pages of related documents. During the early part of the Cold War, Canada launched two overlapping UFO investigations, Project Magnet (1950-54) and Project Second Storey (1952-54). Few if any of the sightings examined by these projects appear to have been made by military sources, the vast majority originating from members of the public.



Former Canadian Defence Minister Paul Hellyer in retirement joined the UK's Lord Hill Norton in the elite group of high profile advocates for "disclosure" of what governments know about the UFO phenomenon. But his government was as clueless as to the nature of the elusive phenomenon as any other.

The Canadian UFO files are much like others that have been gradually opened to public scrutiny as a result of open government and FOI initiatives across the world. They contain many examples of low quality "lights in the sky" and convoluted correspondence between persistent UFO enthusiasts, who believed the authorities were hiding something, and exasperated officials who tried their best to ignore and debunk claims as either hoaxes or misinterpretations of natural and man-made phenomena.

When officials failed to provide satisfying answers this led to an attitude of mutual distrust that created fertile conditions for anti-authoritarian attitudes and conspiracy theories.

Readers will find much of interest in the chapter on close encounter cases from the files. As in the UK and US, the authorities, presented with physical evidence of something unknown, were left with no option but to investigate as best they could. But far from providing any smoking gun, the surviving papers reveal inertia

and a failure to analyse hard evidence.

Hayes makes a serious effort to move the spotlight away from those who see and believe in UFOs to examine the motivations and reactions such experiences generate among the general public and the officials whose job it was to respond to their concerns. One striking outcome of these interactions is the emergence of a conspiracy theory-driven mindset that has become stereotypical of the modern UFO phenomenon.

This is a readable academic summary of the highlights of the little-known Canadian government UFO archive that includes some unique insights into the origins of UFO-related conspiracy theories.

David Clarke

★ ★ ★ ★

The Bavarian Illuminati

The Rise and Fall of the World's Most Secret Society

René Le Forestier

Inner Traditions 2022
Hb, 912pp, £108, ISBN 9781644113776

Jon E Graham's timely translation of this monumental 1915 history of the Bavarian Illuminati is no mean achievement. René Le Forestier's forensic detail and exhaustive research has to be celebrated in its scrutiny of the personages behind the organisation, its bewildering administration and its short-lived prestige prior to its disintegration in 1785.

Given the mythical status of the Bavarian Illuminati in occult history, Le Forestier's study successfully dispels its mythic notoriety and inscribes it within an Enlightenment discourse of humanitarian utopianism.

The narrative is compelling as Le Forestier explores why and how the young and fractious academic Adam Weishaupt (1748-1830) attempted to countermand the Jesuitical control of Bavaria's political and cultural institutions by gathering together a body of like-minded rationalist intellectuals: the Order of the Illuminati, established in May 1776.

Capturing the complex layers of pseudonymous secrecy and the curious intermingling of radicals and aristocrats that marked the early expansionist phase of the order, Le Forestier's attention to

historical accuracy and evident scholarship is peerless. Each of the key players in the story is fully supported with a detailed genealogical and biographical framework before their contribution to the order is assessed. Whether it is Weishaupt himself, or his two right-hand men, Xavier von Zwack (1754-1832) and Ludwig Baron von Knigge (1752-1796), or indeed lesser figures within the order, Le Forestier's dissection of their functionality, whether administrative, financial or mystical, is second to none.

Parallel and integral to the story is that of German Freemasonry itself, and again Le Forestier's skill in analysing how Weishaupt's machinations exploited the unstable authority of many German and European lodges to assert Illuminati primacy is sublime.

There are no dark and sinister secrets to be found within, only the story of an organisation that primarily believed in equality and secular government, albeit dressed up in masonic symbolism. Still, it remained a dangerous pursuit within the authoritarian strictures of Bavarian Catholic orthodoxy and the demise of the order, Le Forestier informs us, was the result of a concerted political and religious initiative following a period of "black ops", in which the libertine claims of members of the Illuminati were taken at face value – fake news, no less!

By 1787, following a sequence of police raids and a ban on membership, Weishaupt fled to Nuremberg and the order disbanded. His life under the protection of Duke Ernest of Gotha was one of isolation and ignominy punctuated by the occasional foray into self-publication – not quite the tentacular puppet master that subsequent mythologies suggest!

Le Forestier's tome is a phenomenal piece of scholarship but possibly not one for the casual reader. With full documentation of all of his source materials, bibliography and index this text is a formidable contribution to our understanding of a fascinating avenue of 18th-century history.

Chris Hill

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Victorian urban legends

Paul Cowdell finds a precursor to emails from a Nigerian prince in this entertaining and impressive collection

The Nail in the Skull

And Other Victorian Urban Legends

Simon Young

University Press of Mississippi 2022
Pb, 270pp, £27.95, ISBN 9781496839466

Urban legends have only sprung to the fore of folklore studies relatively recently. Indeed, introducing this excellent collection of Victorian legends, Simon Young sardonically identifies urban legends as “stories not collected by British and American folklorists before about 1950”.

But what equivalent stories existed in earlier periods? Some we know, through their transmission and translation into our own time, but what else was out there? Young’s collection, centred on English-language newspaper sources, begins to fill the gaps for the 19th century. The 70 stories here are a rich and entertaining read, but Young’s presentation makes the book even more valuable.

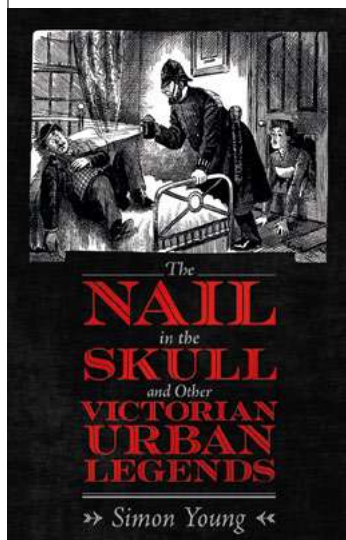
Some of Young’s legends have familiar modern descendants. “The Spanish Prisoner” writes that he has treasure buried near Arbroath (Cardiff, Goole, Tavistock etc), but his treasure map is held in confiscated luggage, so if the letter’s recipient will pay to release that they will get a share of the treasure when it is dug up. Young calls this “the grandfather” of Nigerian prince email scams. “The Ghost in Search of Help”, in which the messenger bringing someone to a friend/relative’s deathbed turns out to be a ghost, is also not unfamiliar, and there have been many attempts to link it to phantom hitchhiker stories.

Other links are there to be discovered: the love note of “Message in a Hat” seems related to modern help messages from sweatshops and warehouses slipped into packaging.

Many stories here, however, are not so familiar, often because

of their specific historic contexts. “Cycling Afflictions” were triggered by the start of the bicycle craze in the 1890s, for example, and by the number of women enthusiasts, but the stories declined within a decade as the hobby became familiar. It would be tempting to search out possible resurgences in new forms, though, as “Bicycle Face” seems a little too good to lose, while the possibility of sex change through head transplant in “The Galvanic Convicts” has a surprisingly modern ring.

Other stories are historically limited by items of dress or technological conditions, often in combination with contemporary social attitudes. Some of these are a little creepy to modern ears, as with the sexual undercurrent



to “The Shoplifter’s Dilemma”, where the woman in question is given the choice of arrest or a good whipping. She chooses the latter. What might happen in a darkened train carriage is a recurrent theme, while what Young charmingly calls “competitive flirtation” leads to two men being fooled into holding hands with each other inside a now outmoded garment. Young was unable to resist calling this one “Hands in the Muff”.

Urban legends are generally grouped together by catchy title, a skill Young justifiably compares to writing great tabloid headlines, and he strikes a fine balance here between the irresistible phrase (“I’m Jack the Ripper!”) and the content of the stories it covers. Even his discussion of the choice of titles is rewarding: he explains well why he reluctantly chose “The Mistletoe Bride” over “Bride and Seek”, but we can share his disappointment.

Each story is given with a headnote containing a plot summary, other references where available and its earliest attestation. The other references include folklore motif index numbers where available, which only underscores how little work has been done on this material. The entry itself usually contains a complete text, elaborated from other sources.

Young tries to balance inclusion and restriction, requiring evidence of circulation (at least three versions must exist) while insisting on a geographical impact on Britain, confined to 19th-century sources. This makes it all the more suggestive for those familiar with later – or earlier – material, who will be struck by many echoes. Every reader of FT will recognise “A Million Postage Stamps”, for example.

The book is great fun, but much more than that.

The introduction gives an invaluable historical overview of the concept of the “urban legend” and its place in folklore studies. This readable introduction is a valuable theoretical text, too, identifying “print folklore” in its relations to oral culture. Even if it is not why you came to the book, I recommend the introduction (and the impressive bibliography) as providing much to contemplate while you savour the delights of stories like “Beetle Eyes” and “Chloroformed!”

I hope very much to see more.

★★★★★

History’s Most Daring Rogues and Villains

And Dirty Rotten Scoundrels

Nigel Blundell

Pen and Sword 2022

Pb, 152pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781399017671

The title, a little like the contents of the book, is a con; it would be better entitled 19th and 20th-century British and American rogues. No mention of Epeius, the builder of the Trojan Horse, for example; indeed, Europeans of all ages get short shrift apart from forgers.

Just over two dozen brief examples of short and long cons are described. The scoundrels include well-known personalities PT Barnum and Tom Thumb, and Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (all complete with rather glamorous Victorian studio photographic portraits) plus many of the second eleven, brothel keeper Cynthia Payne, MP John Stonehouse, even *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* cheat Charles Ingram – all with stories that are familiar (some bear repeating), but the most



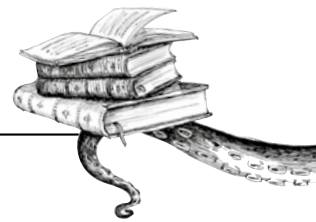
enjoyable are of those persons now quite forgotten and whose tales are totally fresh.

Similarly many of the deceptions are familiar, or rather half remembered; the forged Hitler diaries demonstrate that there are no fools like old fools, unless they are “expert” old fools. Gemstone salting (diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires in the same ant hill would be geologically unique) illustrates beautifully the care needed for a successful long con, incidentally showing that the most effective cons are inflicted by dishonest marks on themselves even if necessarily facilitated by the grifter. Perhaps the most inventive con was the theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre and the subsequent selling of multiple forgeries of it, although selling the Eiffel Tower multiple times and Buckingham Palace once come close.

This is an *amuse-bouche* of a book; there are no real bad apples to spoil the Ronnie Biggs-style escapism it provides. So find the sun, a lounge and with a blue lagoon in hand eat it up.

Rob Ixer

★★★★★



COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

STEVE TOASE PRESENTS HIS LATEST PICKS FROM THE WORLD OF SEQUENTIAL ART



Home To Stay! The Complete Ray Bradbury EC Stories

Various writers and artists
Fantagraphics 2022

Hb, 204pp, £75, ISBN 9781683966562

One of the constant questions that plagues writers is: what do you do if you find someone ripping off your work?

If you are Ray Bradbury, and the plagiarist is EC Comics, you send them a good natured letter asking where your royalty cheque is and suggest that it might work to everyone's advantage to collaborate. Caught fair and square (publisher Bill Gaines admitted: "We swiped his stories, and he caught us."), EC and Bradbury began a mutually beneficial relationship which saw many of Bradbury's stories adapted in EC's inimitable style.

This is an excellent collection, bringing together not only those comic strips adapted from Bradbury stories such as "The Small Assassin" and "There Will Come Soft Rains", but also the 'variations' inspired by Bradbury's work like "Home to Stay", which gives the collection its name.

There are many favourites here from across Bradbury's wide-ranging output, covering both his science fiction stories and those that lean more toward horror. For me, there were many favourites here, including "A Sound of Thunder" and "The October Game".

This is a magnificent and extensive collection, containing over 35 stories, articles about

Bradbury and his relationship with EC Comics, and that magnanimous letter. Yes, this hardcover is at the more expensive end of the comic market, but if you're a fan of either Ray Bradbury or EC Comics, I would highly recommend saving up for a copy.

Count Crowley Vol 2: Amateur Midnight Monster Hunter

David Dastmalchian, Lukas Ketner
Dark Horse 2023

Pb, 104pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781506721392

Jerri Bartman is a recovering alcoholic, aspiring journalist and reluctant host of Friday Night's Scream Theater in her hometown of Beloit, Missouri. Dressing up to introduce horror movies wasn't part of Jerri's lifeplan, and neither was fighting werewolves, vampires and zombies. There are conspiracies, shadowy organisations, and plenty of gore. While the storytelling and artwork revel in the EC Comics they pay tribute to (the story is even introduced by a ghoul called Vincent van Gore), the result feels very modern and doesn't shy away from real-world problems, particularly Jerri's battle with addiction (as shown by the attention to detail in Lukas Ketner's cover) as she tries to get useful information out of her only ally, Freis, who is far too misanthropic to give his help willingly.

The art throughout is excellent, sliding effortlessly between modern settings and invocations of earlier classic horror comics, with Ketner's linework beautifully enhanced by Lauren Affe's colours. This is the second in the series, but the story is clear enough to jump straight into from here – although I definitely think it would be worth your while picking up the first volume as well.

Sacred Lamb

Tim Seeley, Jelena Dordevic
TKO Studios 2023

Pb, 160pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781952203534

Kellyn West is an 'Eve' or EV (endemic victim). EVs are sur-

vivors of serial killers who are believed to put those around them at risk from copycats and are shipped off to the isolated and heavily guarded settlement of Sacred Lamb. Here, the survivors live under the guard of Warden Gennaro and his men, with Dr Kesha Maximillian (herself an EV) on site to help people deal with the psychological damage of surviving violent events, as well as the isolation (and relative calm) of Sacred Lamb itself.

Of course, nothing remains calm for long, and when people start dying the comic brings up questions of survivor guilt, psychological trauma and what happens in a slasher movie after the camera stops rolling. This is an excellent, sometimes visceral comic with a nice twist and a good understanding of the genre it riffs off.

The Man Who Fell to Earth

Dan Watters, Dev Pramanik
Titan Books 2022

Hb, 126pp, £26.99, ISBN 9781787737013

David Bowie was often seen as otherworldly, and it is no surprise that his first major acting role centred around that otherworldliness. In their comic adaptation of *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, Dan Watters and Dev Pramanik have managed to maintain that sense of strangeness. They've also managed to preserve the strangeness of director Nic Roeg's Seventies storytelling, which, like many films of the time, seems slightly off kilter (in a good way). Opening with Bowie's character, Thomas Jerome Newton, pawning a gold ring to make money, the story then unfolds in a series of interviews with the main characters, their anecdotes becoming flashbacks. This is a story that swirls around Newton, told through other people's eyes, allowing it to maintain sufficient distance to keep Newton's strangeness undented. Throughout, the artwork is of a high quality, with some fantastic use of the comic form (such as the emptying of a bottle of gin

over three panels). This is further enhanced by Llorach's colours, and the clear lettering by Jim Campbell.

Is Bowie's identity captured here? For me, he was always hard to pin down, but the comic nails the otherworldly aspects of the singer that fed into the character of Newton. Whether you're a fan of the original movie, just discovering it for the first time via the new TV series, or a longtime Bowie fan, this adaptation will have considerable appeal.

The Night Eaters Book 1: She Eats The Night

Marjorie Liu (w) Sana Takeda
Titan Books 2022

Pb, 208pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781787739666

Knowing *The Night Eaters* was by the team behind the excellent *Monstress*, I had high expectations going in. I wasn't disappointed.

Twins Milly and Billy run a struggling restaurant; the pandemic is further affecting business and their parents (laidback Keon and strict Ipo) are in town. In the middle of all the disruption, Ipo decides to clean up the abandoned, overgrown house next door, and enlists Milly and Billy to help. As you can probably guess, things don't go well.

At the heart, *The Night Eaters* is a haunted house story, but it's

also much more than that, exploring intergenerational relationships, myths, parenting styles and how we cope with threats.

Of course the elephant in the room is Covid19, and Marjorie Liu's writing is a masterclass in how to

tell stories within the pandemic without making it purely about the pandemic. Sana Takeda's artwork perfectly captures the personalities of the characters, with the muted colours of the background ensuring those personalities are to the fore, while also showing the threat within the house as something with presence and heft. Combine the art with the writing, and you have a comic well worth getting.



Astonished and amazed

“There is nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture.” Sixty years on, *The Outer Limits* remains astonishingly good SF television and offers ufological insights aplenty



The Outer Limits: The Complete Original Series

Dir various, US 1963-65,
Medium Rare Entertainment, £74.99
(DVD), £94.99 (Blu-ray)

The Outer Limits has been unfairly hidden in the shadows of *The Twilight Zone*, yet it is an equally fascinating television science fiction series that entertained, astonished and amazed audiences when it was broadcast in the USA from 16 September 1963 to 16 January 1965.

It began with an opening voice over by actor Vic Perrin that warns viewers: “There is nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture. We are controlling transmission. If we wish to make it louder, we will bring up the volume. If we wish to make it softer, we will tune it to a whisper. We will control the horizontal. We will control the vertical. We can roll the image, make it flutter. We can change the focus to a soft blur, or sharpen it to crystal clarity. For the next hour, sit quietly and we will control all

“For the next hour, sit quietly and we will control all you see and hear”

that you see and hear. We repeat: There is nothing wrong with your television set. You are about to participate in a great adventure. You are about to experience the awe and mystery which reaches from the inner mind to... The Outer Limits.”

The very first episode blasted off with the ‘The Galaxy Being’, in which Allan Maxwell, a radio station engineer, becomes obsessed with tracking and decoding strange signals from outer space. When the power of the station is turned up it allows an extraterrestrial being from Andromeda to be transmitted to Earth by electromagnetic radiation. This inadvertent visit violates the laws of its home planet, as contact with humanity is regarded as dangerous, and this certainly proves the case

when it is attacked by the Army. Using radiation, it can deflect weapons, burn people or heal them. The Galaxy Being claims to be a nitrogen-based form of life and that all existence is immortal when it becomes part of the electromagnetic forces that exist throughout the Universe.

Like many of the following episodes, the story uses the theme of a new invention or discovery that fundamentally changes life on our planet. In the second episode, ‘The Hundred Days of the Dragon’, a scientist designs a method of making a face pliable enough to be moulded and shaped and there is a plot for an Asian agent to dispose of a US presidential candidate and reshape his face to impersonate and replace him. Episode four, ‘The Man with the Power’, has Harold J Finley, played by Donald Pleasance, having the God-like power to levitate heavy objects and zap people into oblivion, all down to a brain implant that focuses the energy that surrounds us.

Episode three, ‘The Architects of Fear’, sees a group of scientists

fake an alien landing to encourage world governments to cooperate against a common enemy. One of the scientists, Dr Allen Leighton (Robert Culp), gets the short straw of having his whole body transformed into an alien form to fool any sceptical investigators when he lands his spaceship near the United Nations. As with most *Outer Limits* stories, things do not go as planned! As Leighton’s wife says, not all scarecrows are scary, and the closing narration confirms that “Scarecrows and magic and other fatal fears do not bring people closer together”.

Most women in *The Outer Limits* are portrayed as practical and down-to-earth while the male characters tend to go all mad scientist. Furthermore, in these few early episodes we see subjects that tackle our place in the Universe and show how infinitely small and incredibly dangerous we are in a scheme of things that we can barely imagine – and our scientific tinkering will only get us into even more trouble. As the closing narration of episode four states: “Someday Man will learn to cope with the monsters of the mind. Then, and only then, when the human mind is truly in control of itself, can we begin to utilise the great and hidden powers of the Universe.”

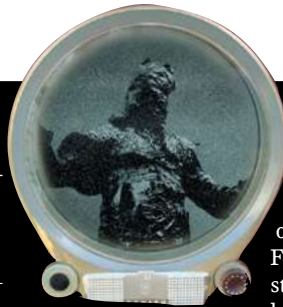
From a UFO point-of-view, we can see that the themes of nuclear destruction, Cold War threats and ecological doom in the series were also echoed in the writings of the contactees of that period, and later in the statements of abductees. Ufologists have also speculated that, as in the ‘The Architects of Fear’ episode, UFO stories may be part of a plan by governments to help make us believe in a fake alien menace or to prepare us for alien disclosure.

Meanwhile, the prominent featuring of mysterious energies and the electromagnetic spectrum bring to mind the theories promoted by John Keel in the



TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



I fully admit I may have been less than reverent towards certain fortean-themed programmes in the past. Given my fondness for the big furry dude, I watch a disproportionately large amount of Bigfoot-related stuff, and, again, I've been guilty of comparing some of these shows with cartoons: whereas *Finding Bigfoot* frequently morphed into *Scooby Doo*, *Mountain Monsters* went full-on *Stop The Pigeon* from day one (complete with daft traps and the Klunk soundalike Wild Bill). Entertaining though these may be, it's a relief when a series comes along and injects a bit of sobriety: *Expedition Bigfoot* (Travel/Discovery) promised such an approach. It's fronted by Ronny le Blanc and Dr Mireya Mayor, and these are organised,

calm researchers, Mayor in particular having a proven and respectable track-record as a primatologist with a large body of work on chimps in the Congo: she knows her ape-stuff. Series one saw them going deep into the Olympic mountains, treating the whole exercise as a standard wildlife research trip: being quietly observant and low-key, as opposed to playing sousaphones or building a giant mousetrap and whooping a lot. When they found potential evidence, they evaluated it dispassionately, acknowledged possibilities

When they found potential evidence they evaluated it dispassionately

besides Bigfoot, and only allowed themselves to become excited if the occasion truly warranted it. For people who are into this stuff, this was good to see; but as has been discussed many times – not least by me – mainstream audiences are less enamoured, favouring fewer microscopes and more sousaphones, so the series' return for a second season showed evidence of that hazardous malady called Producer's Tweak.

One of the early symptoms of Producer's Tweak in any paranormally themed TV programme is the sudden compulsion to insert a dramatic narrative arc into a season. This can quickly override all other content, to the extent that its entire original point falls by the wayside (though in the case of *Mountain Monsters*, having a sub-Men In Black, government cover-up arc was probably much cheaper than the preposterous, anvil-dropping biplane style traps they'd otherwise obliged themselves to construct

each week). The symptoms were less pronounced in *Expedition Bigfoot*, but there was a greater emphasis on action, with former military man Russell Acord stalking around in the deep cover of the woods, whispering at the camera while wearing a backpack that looked, and indeed at times sounded, like a one-man-band kit. "Wow! Shhhh! I think I heard a twig snap up there!" BOOM BANG CRASH PARP. There were mysterious balls of light, dangerous looking caves – "That cave looks dangerous!" "Only one way to find out – go into the cave!" – anomalous heat signatures, hypnotic regression and more cliffhanger reaction shots than you can shake a stick structure at. Nonetheless, it does hold a kernel of hope in the shape of Dr Mayor, who genuinely wants to solve what's going on out there. I have only just acquired Season 3: if Producer's Tweak has advanced too much, it may be time to do the kindest thing.

1970s, and of course brain implants later became a big part of alien abduction scenarios.

Martin Kottmeyer in his 1990 article "Entirely Unprejudiced: The Cultural Background of UFO Abduction Reports", notes that several features of Barney Hill's recollection of his alien abduction in 1961 are very similar to the alien in 'The Bellerose Shield', episode 20 of *The Outer Limits* (see FT322:46-48, 384:44-47, 416:28 and magoniamagazine.blogspot.com/2013/11/entirely-unprejudiced-cultural.html). Although the Hills denied seeing this episode, it is significant it was broadcast only 12 days before Barney's hypnotic regression session that mentions aliens with wraparound eyes. Although

there is no direct link between viewing that episode and Barney's account, it is the type of programme Betty Hill in particular would have been attracted to, and it certainly projected all manner of science fiction concepts to a mainstream audience.

Aliens take over human bodies in 'Corpus Earthling' and 'The Invisibles', while in 'Fun and Games', 'The Special One', 'A Feasibility Study' and 'Second Chance' the plot revolves around alien abductions. 'Keeper of the Purple Twilight' has an alien explain how rationality rules their world, and women are just breeders – the kind of attitude alien greys seem to share. The alien Ebonites in 'Nightmare' interrogate human prisoners using a magic wand that can render you mute, blind

or break your bones.

As the series was created by Joseph Stefano, the screenwriter of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, and Leslie Stevens, it is no surprise that there is a high quotient of horror mixed with the science fiction themes. The sense of menace is highlighted by the use of expressionist-style cinematography, the moody soundtrack and the booming power of the opening and closing narration, all combined with the insidious idea that we are prey to a multitude of unseen forces on our own streets, day or night.

Thirty-two episodes of *The Outer Limits* were broadcast in the series' first run, followed by a further 17 episodes in the second. This set of 11 DVD or Blu-ray discs is remastered to show it in all its monochrome glory, while audio

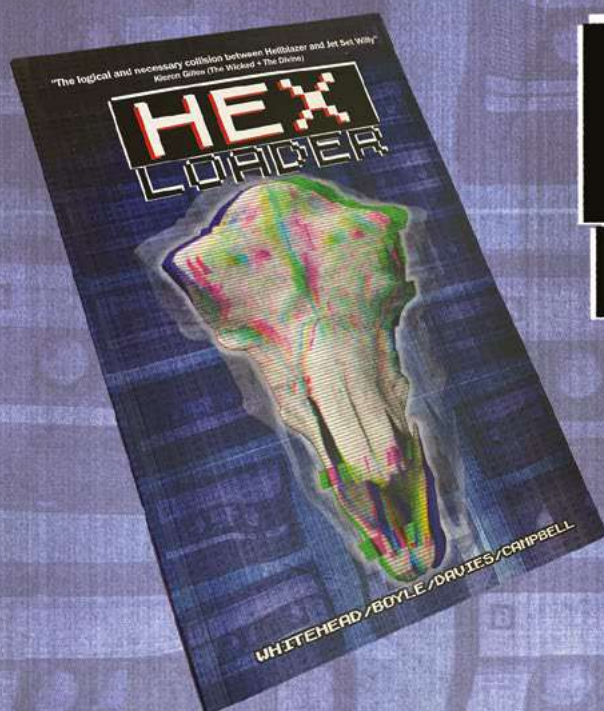
commentaries are provided by film historians David J Schow, Tim Lucas, Craig Bean, Dr Reba Wissner, Gary Gerani, Michael Hyatt and Steve Mitchell. Not only that, there are a good number of bonus features, including David Schow reviewing the monstrous creatures that turned up in virtually every episode and taking a look at Project Unlimited, which created most of the special effects. Other extras include an ABC New Year's Eve Promo, clips from a TV Festival celebrating the show and an interview with writer/director Joseph Stefano.

For the ultimate journey into the Outer Limits of mind, space and time you definitely need this collection.

Nigel Watson



"The logical and necessary collision between Hellblazer and Jet Set Willy"
Kieron Gillen (The Wicked + The Divine)



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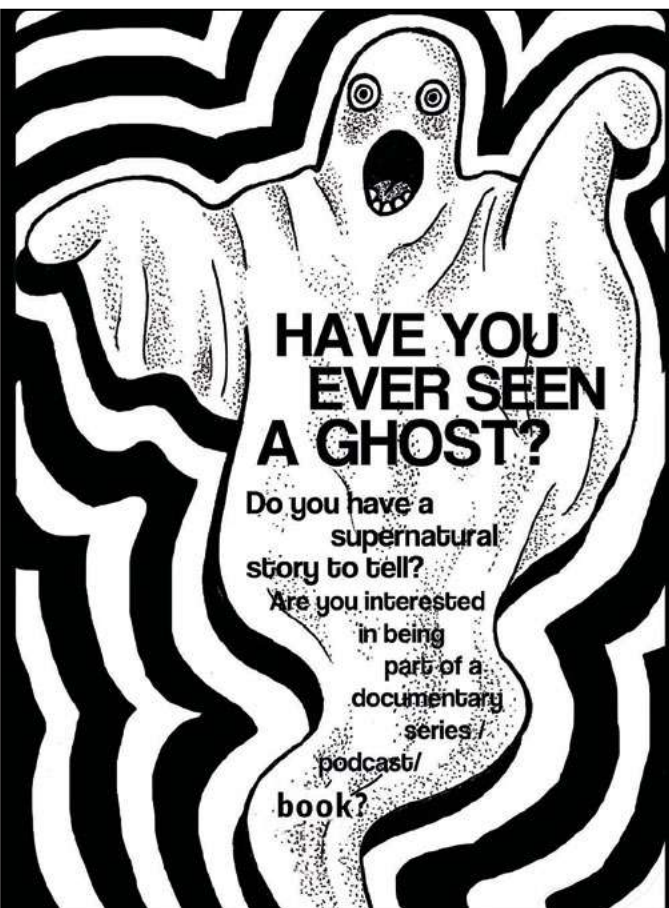
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Wodewose clubs

"In search of British Bigfeet" [FT425:30-36] mentions the wodewose (the wild man of the woods). The article says that wodewose in mediæval manuscripts were often depicted with clubs. There is a good example of this in a book I possess called *The Chronicles of the Wars of the Roses* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1988). On page 138 is a picture of the martyrdom of St Apolline, beneath which are four wodewose. Two are female holding shields which conveniently cover their bodies; the other two are male with clubs on the floor by their side.

In children's television programmes, cartoons, comedy sketches and so on, cavemen are often depicted with clubs. To my knowledge there is no evidence to indicate if cavemen used clubs or not.

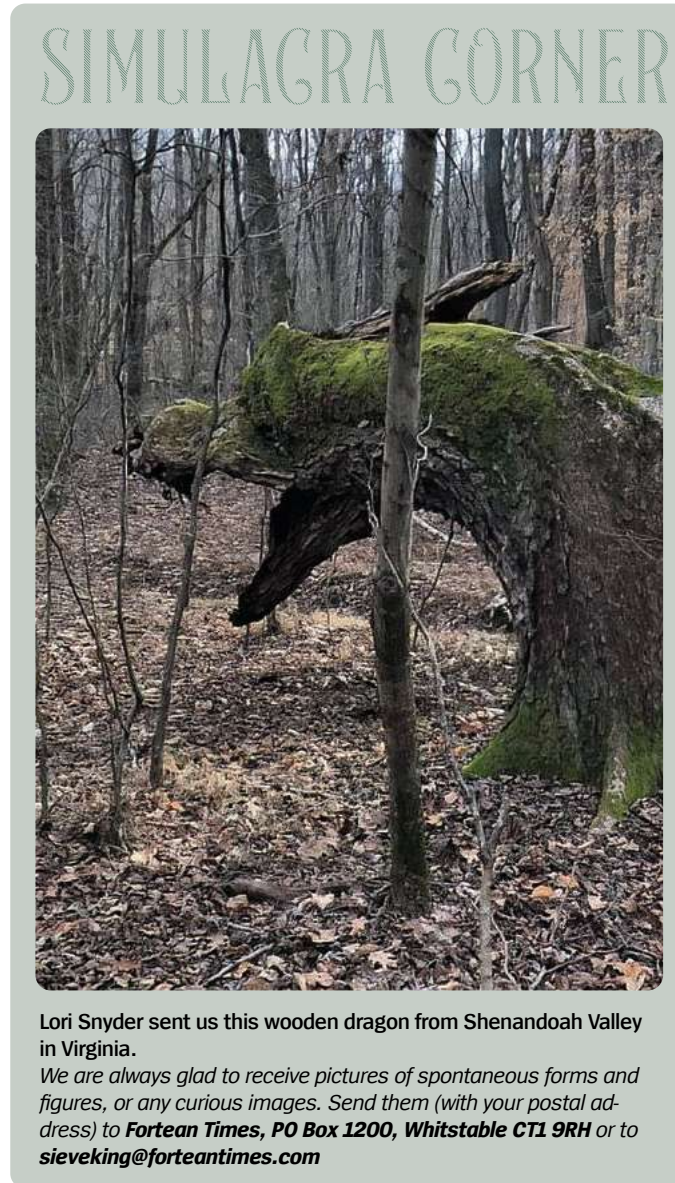
I don't know if I am the first person to make this connection – indeed, I would be surprised if I am – but it seems there is a collective idea of what a 'primitive' man is like. I wonder where this comes from. Did people making stereo-type cavemen images get inspired by mediæval manuscripts – or is there a subconscious memory of such things in our collective mind?

Clive Watson
By email

Not Christopher Lee

Phil Brand says that he recalls reading that Hammer Horror star Christopher Lee, while on a flight to Los Angeles, noticed the words "Tyrone Power is Dead" emblazoned across the sky [FT425:62].

I'm afraid his recollection is as cloudy as the sky; in fact, it was Vincent Price, not Christopher Lee, who saw that doom-laden statement while flying from Los Angeles to New York City – where the said portentous skywriting was confirmed as grimly, and spookily, accurate by an old acquaintance at Price's hotel – on 15 November 1958. Tyrone Power had died suddenly of a heart attack in Madrid at the approximate time Price was winging his way to New York. Price lost a



Lori Snyder sent us this wooden dragon from Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to **Fortean Times**, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteantimes.com

friend, but gained a corking anecdote by way of fortean recompense.

Gary White
Sheffield, South Yorkshire

Politicians and UFOs

Interesting how many politicians have seen UFOs or have claimed to have seen them. President Jimmy Carter claimed this in the early 1970s when he and witnesses saw a strange light-like object in the sky above Plains, Georgia. His successor in the White House, Ronald Reagan, also claimed to have seen a mysterious object together with

his wife Nancy, when they were on a flight. He allegedly said to director Steven Spielberg at the White House screening of the film *ET*: "You do not know how close to real life this is!" Also, as you have pointed out, Richard Nixon allegedly showed US comedian Jackie Gleason the corpses of dead aliens at a USAF base whilst he was President.

However, the best-known UFO devotee and politician was Sir Eric Gairy (1922-97), Prime Minister of Grenada, who had a lifelong interest in the subject, even asking the UN to investigate the potential threat of UFOs to world security. It was while he

was attending a UFO conference in New York that Maurice Bishop and the left-wing New Jewel movement launched the March 1979 coup that toppled his government. [See this month's "Strange Statesmen" for the full story – Ed.]

Phil Brand
London

Show and tell

Reading Adrienne O'Toole's response to Simon Bresson [FT417:67, 425:61] brought to mind the many times that archaeologists are asked variations on the "Where does all the soil come from?" and "Why did they live underground?" questions. The answer is always complicated. Analysis of stratigraphy, geomorphology, and taphonomy etc. inform a site-specific interpretation. Terry Pratchett said something along the lines that what Ankh Morpork is built on is mostly Ankh Morpork.

Fossils growing underground was a new one for me. I'll check with a passing palæontologist.

Dan Barrett
Hereford

Classical cut-ups ?

Barry Baldwin mentions William Burroughs in connection with *sortes Virgilianæ* [FT424:11]. A greater claim to connection with 'cut-ups' lies with the Cento, a genre consisting of short quotations, most often from Virgil, painstakingly montaged to depict something quite different. One of the best-known, the *Nuptial Cento* of Ausonius, portrays wedding celebrations, at the end of which the bride is exhaustively deflowered (cue gaseous emissions from the *Aeneid*). HG Evelyn White, possible victim of Tutankhamun's curse, gets quite hot under the collar about this in his Loeb edition of 1919: "Neither the thorough knowledge of Virgil's text, nor the perverse ingenuity displayed in the compilation, can redeem this literary outrage". One wonders what he'd have made of *The Soft Machine*.

Richard George
St Albans, Hertfordshire

Age-old questions

In the annals of supercentenarianism, the French Jeanne Calment continues to top the list of people with a verified age, reaching a ripe old 122 years and 164 days when she breathed her last in 1997 [FT103:7]. It may seem unlikely that another woman in the 20th century could have beaten that record by 17 years, if not more, while remaining under the radar of longevity researchers, but the story of María Jesús Pinto suggests exactly that.

Clyde Edgar Keeler (1900-1994) was a renowned Harvard-trained geneticist with an amateur interest in archaeology, anthropology and comparative mythology. He developed a particular fascination for the Guna people of eastern Panama, whom he visited numerous times. In his book *Secrets of the Cuna Earthmother; A Comparative Study of Ancient Religions* (1960, pp.226-228) he reported on an excursion to the province of Chiriquí in the far-western part of that country, during which he met María at her home:

"I bent over to shake hands with Maria Jesus Pinto, the most aged lady I had ever met. She was seated in a low hammock made of sisal fibers which had been her refuge for rest during many years. This moment when I greeted her in Spanish was one of the high points in my life as a medical geneticist. The Bible says that the days of a man's life are 'three score years and ten', but here was an individual rounding out six score years and twenty, or seven score. A woman, according to our best checking, of one hundred and forty years of age come her next birthday... Presumably, she was born in 1820."

The claimed age beggars belief, but is difficult to brush aside, given Keeler's medical expertise. He went on to give a detailed description of her condition:

"There was still some power



"A woman of one hundred and forty years of age"

The wrinkles of her face were less deeply furrowed than I had imagined they would be. Her ears had grown large as is often the case with excessively old persons. There was a slight yellowish cast to her good head of whitened hair which she parted in the middle and wore in two braids, except above her forehead where some black hairs continued to survive. It is well known that Indians usually do not get white hair until after the age of one hundred, and I know one of eighty-six without a single white hair. Her teeth were gone. She could see to move about with her once sharp brown eyes, now faded to light gray. When necessary,

in her warm handshake, and I noted that age was still dealing more kindly with her than with most people in their seventies. To be sure, the veins of her thin lower arms were much distended, but I have seen worse. The skin of her lower arms was excessive and hung in folds. Her complexion was somewhat sallow and a bit lighter than one might expect for a mestizo because for years she has stayed indoors.

LEFT: Maria Jesus Pinto, photographed by Clyde Keeler. BELOW LEFT: Keeler's 1960 book *Secrets of the Cuna Earthmother*, in which his account of meeting Pinto appeared. FACING PAGE: Thomas Parr, said to have lived to the age of 152.

she could manage to get up out of her hammock alone. Her mind was good, her outlook cheerful and contented, and when I presented her with a bright new pipe she thanked me courteously in Spanish and exhibited a pleasant smile. She was much stooped and a bit unsteady in walking, but she did not use a cane."

So spirited was she that she would not have her picture taken unprepared: "When I asked if I might take her photograph she replied: 'Of course you may, but not this way! Just wait a minute.' She hobbled slowly into the next room and exchanged her old house dress for her Sunday best, demonstrating that she still possessed a bit of the 'eternal feminine'."

Keeler was happy to credit María's hardiness to her mixed genes: "To a medical geneticist the miracle of the longevity of Maria Jesus is not difficult to explain. She derived much of her unusual vigor from hybridity, just as do hybrid chickens or hybrid corn. She represents the first generation of a cross between French and Guaymí Indian, which is vigorous, but subsequent generations will live no longer than the average person. Besides, Maria Jesus had lived simply all her life and had observed moderation in all things, especially her diet."

Or had Keeler been gullible after all? He stated expressly that the primary reason for his visit had been that "Mrs. Pinto..., through her granddaughter..., was my principal source of information about the secrets of the Guaymí religion." That her extraordinary age was of secondary importance to him at best can also be gleaned

from the fact that he made no effort to prove it to his readers. Short of providing photocopies of her identity documents, it would have helped if at least he had furnished us with the date of birth of María's granddaughter, whom he knew personally, if not also that of the granddaughter's mother or father. Sure, Keeler gave a lively account of how María's parents had got involved with each other, but this is legend-like – devoid of definite names, times and places.

Keeler was vague even about the details of his own meeting with María, leaving his audience to infer from the context in the book that it took place on his seventh and then latest trip to Panama, when he also met the native chief or 'Montezuma' in the town of Remedios. Judging by the appearance of an article he wrote about that latter event in the June 1958 issue of the *Bulletin of the Georgia Academy of Science* (16. 2, pp. 53-63), it must have happened in the first half of 1958, but this causes a slight conflict with the purported age of 139 years and birth in 1820. It is also surprising that Keeler's experience with María was not itself covered in the pages of that journal, given that Keeler republished so many other chapters of his book in it. Did his text fail to meet the rigorous standards of peer review, or had Keeler been reticent to submit it in the first place? Nor does María look the part of someone that ancient, to a layman, in the photograph that Keeler supplied in his book. In that, she might be 80 or 90 for all one knows.

For how much longer did María live following the savant's visit? What is on her death certificate? Regrettably, this information is not available to us. What if she had hung on for another decade or

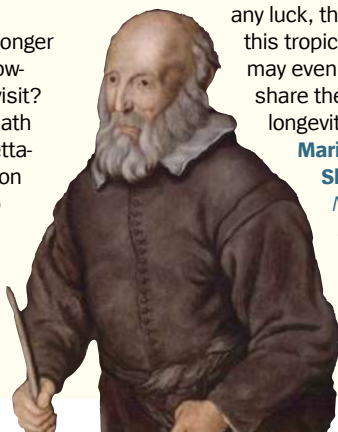
more? Except for the missing date of her passing, María's case is perhaps on a par with that of old Thomas Parr, whose white marble gravestone is still on display in Westminster Abbey. It boldly states that Parr lived through the reign of 10 kings and queens, expiring on 15 November 1635 at the age of 152 years. This and other details of his life given in John Taylor's contemporary pamphlet *The Old, Old, very Old Man or the Age and Long Life of Thomas Parr* (1635) inhabit a forteen limbo: they have neither been conclusively falsified nor sufficiently substantiated. Despite the personal involvement of notables including King Charles I, it stretches credulity that Parr should not have married until his eightieth year of age, to point out just one snag. Stretching credulity proves nothing in itself, however; strange things do happen.

While chances of a breakthrough are vanishingly small with regard to Parr, it is eminently possible that more about María can still be learned from Keeler's privately published autobiography, *The Gene Hunter* (1984), or his extensive archive in the care of Georgia College (<https://lib-guides.gcsu.edu/keeler-collection>). Indeed, essential clues may well await someone willing to travel down to this remote corner of Panama, interview the community and search the local archives. From personal experience, be it on the Costa Rican side, I can vouch for the welcoming and helpful attitude towards foreigners among the Guaymí or, as they prefer to be called, the Ngäbe. With

any luck, the denizens of this tropical paradise may even be willing to share the secret key to longevity.

Marinus van der Sluijs

Namyangju, South Korea



ABOVE: Charles and Ryan Rajnus (plus Nessie-like humps) at Pixie Park.

Inner voices

A book on neurology by Guy Leschziner, *The Man Who Tasted Words*, mentions that brain scans indicate a part of the brain that reacts to external voices also lights up in response to people hearing supposed inner voices. What if in this case it indicates that those voices are really coming from an external source to the person hearing it, unlike the paranoid?

Tony Sandy

Alness, Highlands

Oregon Nessie?

On 25 September 2022, it was a very warm day in northwest Oregon, so Carla Rajnus – along with her son Charles (29) and grandson Ryan (five) – sought some cool recreation. An impromptu snapshot taken at Pixie Park (next to the Columbia River in Columbia City, Oregon) inadvertently shows a blurry object in the water next to the shoreline. Swimming is not recommended in the Columbia River due its depth, water temperature and swift current. In Scotland in AD 565, according to legend, St Columba first spotted Nessie in Loch Ness. In this snapshot, the floating object appears to be similar to other images of Nessie with a row of humps running along its back. Many photos of this kind have been written off as floating branches. (Oddly enough, in this same area along the Columbia River, countless sightings of Bigfoot have also been reported).

It is noteworthy that this

appearance of a Nessie-like object occurred at Pixie Park, as pixies are trickster characters similar to fairies, elves, nixies, sprites and kelpies. In Scottish folklore, a kelpie is a shape-shifting water spirit inhabiting lochs, usually described as having horse-like features. Some have claimed that Nessie is a type of kelpie. In folklore, water fairies protect waterways, wells and lakes. Some scholars assert that the term "pixie" (from the Latin *picti*) is related to the Picts, who once lived along the banks of Loch Ness, so named because they covered their bodies with enigmatic tattooed pictures [FT284:40-43].

So is it coincidence that a Nessie-like shape was spotted in the Columbia River, and St Columba's sighting was the first documented appearance of Nessie? On the other hand, the Oregon Nessie was photographed from Pixie Park – and pixies are water spirits linked to the Picts. It boggles the mind.

Jeffrey Vallance

By email

We can see you

You missed the comedic element of the green goblin gang on the New York subway [FT426:10]: they believed that wearing green bodysuits rendered them invisible to CCTV, due to greenscreen/chromakey technology from Hollywood FX. A little knowledge is more harmful than none at all.

Gianni Franco Crovace

By email

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

PRECOGNITIVE DREAMS

On the topic of precognitive dreams, I think one has to regard them in the light of how the subjects of dreams arise generally. I think there is not much doubt that the dreaming mind selects images or subjects from waking life more or less randomly, and mixes them up and distorts them. Thus if you happened to see a famous musician busking in your high street, and the next night you dreamed about some other famous musician busking in the high street, it would not be controversial to say that the one was the cause of the other.

Following JW Dunne, one can speculate that these random images can be collected not just from the last few days, but also from the *next* few days. I can give an example. One night I had a dream in which I was standing on a brick parapet and was trying to vacuum up some stuff at the base. To do this, I had a long aluminium tube that I was lowering down the face of the brick wall. The next morning, walking to work, I saw something I had never seen before. Passing the gable end of a row of brick terraced houses, I saw two workmen at the top of the gable, fitting a new flue into one of the chimneys. A chimney flue is a long aluminium tube, and this was snaking down the side of the brick wall as the workmen fed it into the chimney. It was strikingly the image from my dream, something I had never seen before or even thought about. If I had had the dream the following night, no one would doubt the connection – but the dream came first. As a precognition it was utterly without any importance; it's just the way that dreams are randomly assembled.

My speculative rationalisation is that while the conscious mind appears to be fixed in the present moment, the subconscious mind (which deals with dreams) is distributed over recent past and near future in something like a Gaussian



"I HAD A DREAM IN WHICH I WAS STANDING ON A PARAPET TRYING TO VACUUM UP SOME STUFF AT THE BASE"

distribution. This could explain a few other things like déjà vu, animals anticipating natural disasters, and so on.

Roger Musson
Edinburgh

NOT YET UTTERED

My wife and I are currently decorating and I work night shifts. Quite often I will come home at around 6.30am and find my wife has completed some task or other. I came home two mornings ago [30 November] and walked into the kitchen to make a cup of tea and noticed she'd painted the kitchen ceiling. "Oh wow, that's looks nice", I said out loud, made my

tea, then went to sleep on the settee for a couple of hours so as not to disturb her before she has to get up for work.

She got up around 8.00 and woke me to let me know I could go to bed and told me she'd heard me say "Wow, that looks nice". I said I did because I was impressed with what she'd done. She then told me that she'd heard me say it and thought I'd come home early for some reason, so came to look for me but when she couldn't find me went back to bed... as it was only 4 o'clock.

Shaw Stretton
Tingewick, Buckinghamshire

NATHANIELS

I had an interesting synchronicity recently. Let me set the scene. I had travelled into London to wait for a friend in the Leadenhall Road. We were going to the Jeff Waynes's War of the Worlds immersive experience. I arrived really early to make sure I didn't miss him, and noticed a neon sign on

the Leadenhall building reading "We are All One", but with the second L flickering on and off, so it sometimes said "We are Alone", to give everyone an existential crisis. It was a similar idea to when Benjamin Creme, or "Maitreya", put "God is Now Here" in the newspapers, so he could say "Gotcha" to everyone and claim it really said "God is Nowhere".

Anyway, after I had a Starbucks and was sitting on a public bench, a pleasant charity worker who was raising awareness of limiting knife crime through social programmes introduced himself as "Nathaniel" and asked if he could basically go through his spiel. I was nice about it, and I ended up giving him a small donation. His name, Nathaniel, was the same as one of the characters in the *War of the Worlds* drama. Nathaniel is the parson who takes on the Martians with his devout faith and gets vaporised, after singing a passionate duet with his wife about The Spirit of Man. What's more, it's interesting that 'Nathaniel' also ties in with being the name of one of the ghosts in *The Woman in Black*. Since I saw that scary film at Brentwood boarding school, where every Wednesday night the housemasters would screen a VHS that was rated by the BBFC as completely unsuitable for our age-group.

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

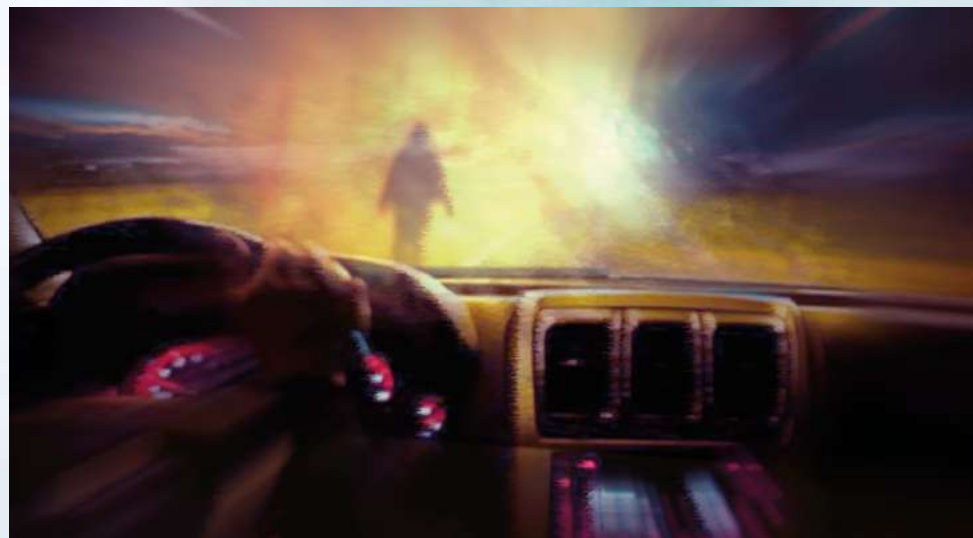
CHILDHOOD WONDERS

It's fair to say I've always been interested in dark literature and all things inexplicable. Sneaking my dad's Stephen King books to bed with me and sitting on the windowsill to read by streetlight was one of my favourite pastimes when I was around nine or 10 years old. So I wonder now if the creepy memories from early childhood are in fact not memories at all, but an imagination for something I loved, even before I understood what it really was.

I was around three or four when I had my first experience of the unknown. I was lying in bed one morning. The curtains were closed, but the sun filtered through them creating a warm glow. In the next bedroom I could hear the low murmur of my parents talking, interspersed with bursts of laughter. Then I heard tapping on the bedroom door and a child's voice saying, "Let me in". I knew there wasn't anybody else in the house. I remember feeling afraid as the tapping and the voice continued. I could still hear my parents and wondered why they didn't come to investigate. I didn't want to open that door, so covered my head with the blankets until the tapping and the voice stopped. I can't remember if I told my parents at the time, but I remember years later telling my dad about the incident, and him shrugging his shoulders and asking if I was putting the kettle on, or did I intend for him to die of thirst? No answers there then.

The second time, I was a little older, maybe five. For some reason I was in bed with my mum. She was fast asleep next to me, and through the gloom I could see a wardrobe and a vanity table, all dark wood, and in front of the vanity table, a chair, on the back of which was draped one of my mum's blouses. I remember it well; it was bright yellow. I watched it rise off the back of the chair and flail around, arms flapping almost as if it were dancing. I held my breath and clenched my teeth, too scared to blink and lose sight of it for a second. It didn't last very long and once it returned to the chair it didn't move again.

My last strange experience from childhood that I can remember, I was around six or seven. We'd moved from Manchester to Liverpool and I had a huge attic bedroom. It was evening and I was sitting on the bed. The light was on and I was playing with dolls and listening to the sounds of the pub across the road. I saw something move on the floor in my peripheral vision, and turned to see a hand. It scuttled across



"HE JUST APPEARED AS A SOLID BLACK FIGURE, STANDING RIGHT NEXT TO ME"

the room, and off to the left side, where I lost sight of it. I was petrified and panting for air. There was no doubt in my mind about what I'd seen, even though it made no sense. The hand was hairless and pale, and moved like a spider on long thin fingers. I crouched on the bed for what seemed like hours, looking over at the jumble of toy boxes behind which it had disappeared. I think I cried; I'm pretty sure I shouted for my mum, but up in that room she couldn't hear me. Eventually, I slipped off the bed and ran down into my mum's room where I dived into her bed.

It's said that children's minds are open to everything, not just imagination but also to other dimensions. The world hasn't had time to suppress the wonders they witness with adult rules and fears. Now, over 40 years later, the adult me says it was all my imagination; but the child in me still shakes her head. She knows the truth from all those years ago, because she was there.

Joanne Bober
Litherland, Liverpool

STOCK STILL

When I was in my 20s I lived in North Lincolnshire, in the curiously named 'Isle of Axholme', a cluster of villages centred around the small town of Epworth. One evening at dusk – around year 2001 – I was on my way to my friend's house to spend the night. It was not yet dark, but the daylight was definitely fading. The journey involved a drive of around 20 minutes along empty country roads with no markings or lighting and very little traffic, so it was just me, my headlights and the radio.

On the outskirts of her village there was a T-junction, a turn just off to the right from the main road I was driving on. There were no buildings or trees, just the junction with ditches and fields on either side. As I approached, in the dim light I could see the figure of a tall man standing in the middle of the junction, apparently dressed in black.

My first thought was that he was most likely heading home from the local pub, perhaps a bit worse for wear. He was facing down the road I needed to be on, and so had his back to me as I approached the junction. He was holding his arms slightly 'out' on both sides, as if he were about to levitate, much like the pose struck by many a magician attempting this feat – but he was making

no movement at all.

I slowed down and steadily approached the junction ready to turn. I had started to feel a little uneasy. I could see that I could slowly drive around him, passing him on my right-hand side. I turned into the junction; As I moved past him, he didn't move at all, and didn't look down at me; he just stood stock-still, facing forwards. I couldn't see a face; he just appeared as a solid black figure, standing right next to me. I very slowly made my way around him and did not take my eyes off him for a second, not until I had to look forward to check the road ahead. I did this and then immediately looked back in my mirrors – but he had vanished. Nothing. Unless he had immediately run and jumped into a ditch there was nowhere he could have gone.

I made a speedy final couple of miles to my friend's house, and told her and her mother what had happened. Her mother seemed unsurprised and told me that the junction was a site of many accidents, both from the past with horses and carts, to subsequently with cars and other vehicles. Perhaps he was a lost soul from one of these incidents and had returned to make sure that I took the turn slowly and safely while driving in the twilight.

Helen Sharp
Switzerland

PECULIAR POSTCARDS



JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past records the words of canine wisdom shared by the eloquent Brownie, Jerry and Tarzan...

33. THREE AMERICAN TALKING DOGS

As regular readers will know, talking dogs were all the rage in Edwardian times: their doyen was the German dog Don (FT282:32-37) who had a vocabulary of nine words and was said to sometimes use them intelligently. A star of the Berlin music hall in the 1910s, he later crossed the Atlantic and spent some considerable time in New York. But in America, Don had three later rivals, who all issued postcards to advertise their loquacious exploits.

In the 1930s, the American housewife Mrs Hilda Lenhart, of Roselle Park, New Jersey, amused herself by teaching her two mongrel dogs to imitate the human voice. In September 1938, she brought her two dogs, Buddie and Brownie, to *Uncle Ben's Show* on the local radio station. The six-year-old Buddie was the mother of five-year-old Brownie, who soon became quite proficient, frequently appearing on the *Hobby Lobby* children's show. In November 1938, when Mrs Lenhart was taking Brownie for a walk, an unmuzzled stray dog came running up, taking an immediate dislike to the great performer. When Mrs Lenhart



tried to defend the talking dog, she was herself bitten hard by the other animal. Her injuries did not prevent her from appearing on the radio a few days later: Brownie was in good form and said "Hello!", "How are you?", "Aunt Mary" and "I love you!" Performing at the *Hobby Lobby* show in 1939, the talking dog astonished the audience by exclaiming "Goddamit, I have had enough of this baloney!" The person responsible was a ventriloquist in the audience, who wanted to poke fun at the talking dog. Mrs Lenhart's proudest moment came when she and Brownie appeared before a scientific committee: the talking dog went through his entire repertoire, being photographed as he exclaimed "I want my mama!" Their final newsworthy exploit was giving an interview to the *American Weekly* in May 1942.

Brownie's place in the spotlight was taken over by Jerry the Talking Dog, a small tan-and-white terrier owned by Mr Riley Madison Bryan, of Bryan's Photo Studio in Grundy, Virginia. In October 1944, a *New York PM Daily* journalist saw and heard the dog there, with the headline 'A Reporter (Sober) Finds A Dog That Really Talks!'. Jerry had



TOP: A postcard advertising Brownie, the New Jersey talking dog. ABOVE: Brownie speaks, from the *American Weekly*, 17 May 1942.

seemed just like any other dog until he was four months old, although Mr Bryan noticed that the dog seemed to listen to the conversation as if he understood the words. Jerry started talking when he was nine months old, and now he was five years old and very proficient. Mr Bryan dangled a slice of roast beef in front of the dog, asking, "Do you want this?"

"I want it," the talking dog replied in his guttural voice, and he got it. Jerry also mastered the phrases "I run", "No, no", "I want out", "Mama" and "I won't". He was on his best behaviour throughout the journalist's visit; when asked what he would do if a big bulldog started after him, the clever little dog said "Run, I run." Mr Bryan said that in spite of many offers, he had always refused to sell Jerry, or to exploit him for money. Instead, they went to entertain the wounded soldiers at various Virginia military hospitals, with considerable success. After receiving a generous sponsorship deal from the Pyroil lubricant company in Wisconsin, Jerry learnt to say "Hubba Hubba!", to dial the telephone and to sing and mimic famous actors. He was given a comfortable vehicle in which to tour hospitals and invalids' homes, appearing on radio more than once, being featured by *Life* magazine, and issuing a postcard to advertise both himself and Pyroil lubricant. Mr Bryan was pleased to sign these postcards, and there is one on the Internet dated 6/4/46. Nothing is known about Jerry the Talking Dog after that date, however.

Jerry's fame was usurped by Tarzan the Talking Dog, a Boston terrier living at the Casino, Kelley's Island, Ohio. The career of this loquacious canine began in 1947, when Mrs Ann Tacke brought home a five-week Boston terrier puppy as a present for her husband Ray, proprietor of the Casino. Since Tarzan was a clever little dog with an uncommonly wide vocal range, exclaiming "Er-er-er" with the greatest of ease, Ray Tacke got the idea of training him to repeat words. Being rewarded with a slice of burger when he got it right, Tarzan soon mastered the word "Hamburger!" Since this was the little dog's favourite food, the Tackes once took him to a burger joint when visiting New Orleans, and asked the owner if their dog could have a burger if he asked for it. When Tarzan exclaimed "Hamburger! Hamburger!" in a deep growling



LEFT: A postcard featuring Jerry the Talking Dog. BELOW LEFT: And another featuring Tarzan the Talking Dog.

voice, the owner gladly provided him with one. When Tarzan was featured in the local newspaper in 1951, Mr Tacke boasted that his little dog had learnt to say "I like liver", "Milk" and "Ice cream". Tarzan had toured Toledo and Detroit for after-dinner speaking appointments and was in search of a radio sponsor. He could also dance, emitting a curious humming noise as he jiggled away. Whenever his 'girlfriend', the Boston terrier Trixie who lived near the Casino, was mentioned, he exclaimed "I love her!"

Since many people came to the Casino to see and hear Tarzan, the little dog's fame grew steadily. In between talking shows, he led an ordinary dog's life at Kelley's Island, sniffing around, gnawing bones and eating scraps. Although fond of his girlfriend Trixie, he was also more than friendly with a little spaniel named Ginger who also lived nearby. In September 1954, he was photographed by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, being described as one of Kelley Island's major tourist attractions, second only to fishing. When doing a radio show in July 1955, the Tackes mentioned that Tarzan had twice been examined by sceptical scientists. A Carnegie Tech scholar, who suspected that ventriloquism was involved, had to admit that it was the dog's own voice. An obtuse Ohio State professor declared that although all dogs had the anatomical potential to imitate the human voice, only very few, like Tarzan, were able to control their oesophagus and contort their mouth to be able to form words.

The regulars at the Casino were very much impressed with the little dog, believing every word that Ray Tacke told them about Tarzan's impressive vocabulary. Once, when asked who was his favourite politician, Tarzan exclaimed "Er-er-er!" "Goddamit, he is a fan of Eisenhower!" shouted the ready-witted Mr Tacke, to the uproarious laughter of the audience. There is no mention of Tarzan after 1956, however, and a local newspaper has suspected that he was run over and flattened by a careless pensioner in his large American car. The memory of this Ohio wonder dog is kept alive by the homepage and magazine of the Kelley's Island Historical Association.

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is

in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

THE ANUNNAKI

HUNT EMERSON

THE ANUNNAKI WERE A GANG OF GODS THAT INFESTED ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA, LED BY MARDUK...

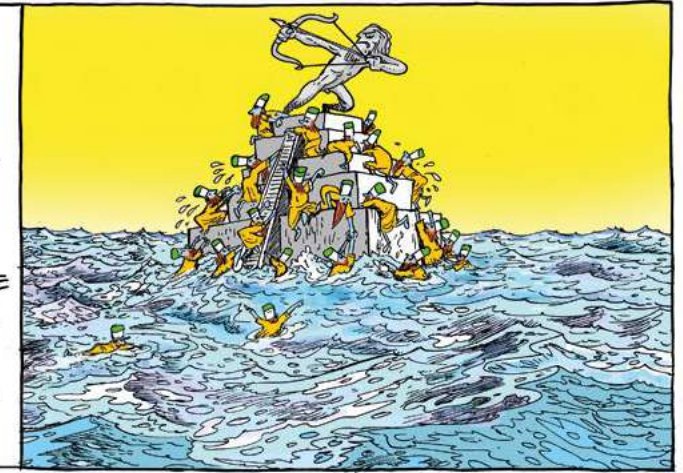


THEY HAD VARIOUS POWERS AND NUMBERS, AND THEY SEEM TO HAVE BEEN TROUBLE WHEREVER THEY SHOWED UP!

BEING GODS, THIS DISTURBANCE CAUSED GLACIERS TO MELT, RESULTING IN A GREAT FLOOD...



NIPPUR'S RESIDENT GOD GANG, THE ESHUMESHA, HAD TO TAKE REFUGE IN THE TEMPLE OF NINURTA (A NIMROD-TYPE HUNTING GOD, WHO WAS NOT AT ALL HAPPY ABOUT THIS INFLUX OF WET ESHUMESHA!)



THE ANUNNAKI LEFT THE EARTH AND STAYED IN ORBIT UNTIL THE FLOOD WATERS RECEDED...



ENLIL, ONE OF THE BIG BOSS GODS, WAS ANGRY AT ALL THIS NONSENSE, AND SENT THE ESHUMESHA TO SORT OUT MARDUK AND HIS MOB...



THERE WAS A RUMPUS, AND THE ANUNNAKI CAPTURED ENLIL'S LOT...



AFTER A LOT OF SHOUTING, MARDUK AND ENLIL WENT TO TRIAL...



THE TEXT ENDS THERE, WITH A WARNING TO THE WORLD NOT TO HAVE WARS BETWEEN GODS, AS NO GOOD EVER COMES OF IT...



...AND IT IS RUMOURED THAT, WITH APPEAL AND COUNTER APPEAL BETWEEN THE TWO SETS OF GODS, THE TRIAL CONTINUES TO THIS DAY UNRESOLVED!

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NEXT MONTH**



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**FLYING TURDS, FARTING DEMONS
AND ANAL EXORCISMS**



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**BUDDHISM & SCIENCE,
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AND MUCH MORE...**

**FORTEAN TIMES 429
ON SALE 23 FEB 2023**

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A 69-year-old Danish man named only as "AC" took a sip of coconut water from a coconut that had been left on his kitchen counter for at least a month, when it should have been refrigerated. As it tasted disgusting, he only took a tiny sip and immediately spat it out, then rinsed his mouth repeatedly to get rid of the awful taste, only swallowing a very small amount. Several hours later, he felt sweaty and ill, vomited copiously and then collapsed in a contorted position. He was rushed to hospital where his condition declined dramatically, with his liver and kidneys failing, his brain swelling so much that cerebrospinal fluid oozed through the sutures in his skull, and his muscles starting to break down. He died less than 24 hours after admission. Doctors were initially baffled as to the cause, but it was eventually identified as 3-nitropropionic acid poisoning, caused by an infection of the fungus *Arthrrium saccharicola* that he had ingested from the spoiled coconut. *boingBoing.net*, 13 Dec 2022; original report at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7774558/, 27 Jan 2021.

Police investigating a car that had careered through a parking lot in Charleston, South Carolina, and hit an unoccupied vehicle, found the driver, 35-year-old Ahmad Gardner, dead inside with a gunshot wound "in the groin area". Witnesses said that they had seen Gardner attempting to make a U-turn in his car, during which he seemed to lose control. As a result, police deduced that a gun tucked into his trousers had accidentally discharged while he was making the manoeuvre, shooting him in the groin and causing him to bleed to death. *wistv.com*, 14 Dec 2022.

Ozgur Gevrekoglu, 32, was packing up after a hunting weekend with friends on the Kizlan Plateau in Turkey when, just after he put a still-loaded shotgun into the boot of his car, his dog jumped in too, stepping on the trigger and blasting him at short range. Gevrekoglu was rushed to Alaçam State Hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival. While FT has regularly reported deaths caused by dogs firing guns, at least one Turkish news outlet deemed the story so unlikely that they suspected murder, and the case is being investigated by the public prosecutor's office. *mirror.co.uk*, 28 Nov 2022.

In Makassar, Indonesia, while an attempt on the world tug of war record involving a 1,540-metre (1 mile) long rope and more than 5,000 participants was being prepared, one of them, named as Masita B, allegedly paused to take a selfie. As she did so, for reasons that remain unclear, the rope snapped and recoiled, tripped Masita up, dragged her along the tarmac and smashed her head against a concrete barrier, resulting in her death from severe head trauma. Reports also say that between three and 13 other people were injured in the incident, and the record attempt was abandoned. *mirror.co.uk*, 21 Dec 2022.

When a swarm of bees took up residence on a property belonging to Nkosenzha Njimbana, 58, in Qonce, South Africa, he interpreted it as a visit from his ancestors. In the local Xhosa tradition, ancestral spirits can be reincarnated as bees or lizards and visit descendants' homes to warn families that they need to perform a traditional ceremony. Njimbana consulted a *sangoma* for advice and returned to his property to perform the "ukugxotha iinyosi" or "dispensing of the bees" ritual and interpret their message. However, when he did so, instead of flying away, the swarm descended on him and stung him to death. His brother Mandla said: "This is the most painful thing ever to befall our family. We don't understand why they were so angry with him, as he had welcomed them to his home. He never tried to violently chase them away." Traditional spokesperson Loyiso Nqevu said that Njimbana's death was a result of the wrath of the ancestors due to his failure to decode their message. Siani Tinley from the local authority, on the other hand, said that hiring professional bee removers or beekeepers was the only way to safely get rid of the bees: "The beekeepers know how to read the bees and how to relocate them in an environmentally friendly way." *dailymail.co.uk*, 7 Dec 2022.

As Hurricane Ian came ashore in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, Markell Hope, from Akron, Ohio, decided to show off by performing a handstand on the balcony of his room at the Patricia Grand Hotel. He was instantly blown off the balcony by the storm's 100mph (160kph) winds and fell 15 floors to his death. A police spokesperson said: "Nobody deserves to die in a hurricane, but this guy comes very close." *Sunday Sport*, 9 Oct 2022.

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